



LOST LIBERTY?

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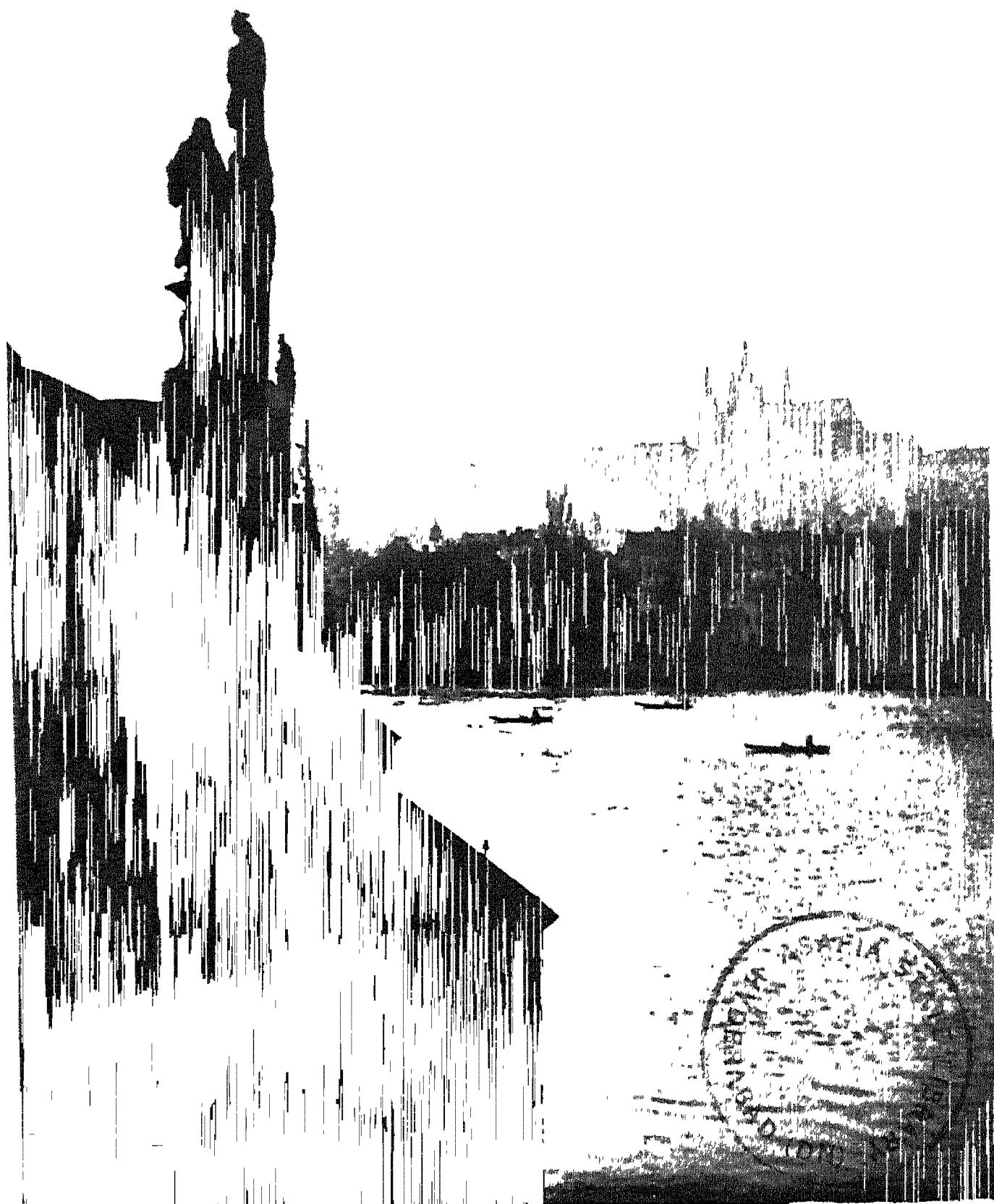
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GLASS HOUSES & MODERN WAR  
ALTERNATIVE TO REARMAMENT  
*and was formerly Editor of*  
ESSENTIAL NEWS





*Jonathan Griffin*

Prague: the Castle and the Charles Bridge

# LOST LIBERTY?

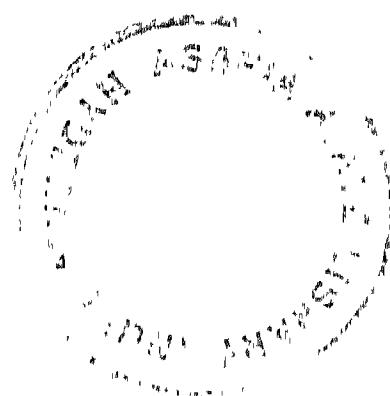
*The Ordeal of the Czechs  
and the  
Future of Freedom*

*by*

Joan & Jonathan Griffin

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TO  
THE REPUBLIC AND PEOPLE  
OF  
MASARYK AND BENEŠ

“A lion is a lion, even in a cage; he doesn’t turn into a donkey.”

MASARYK



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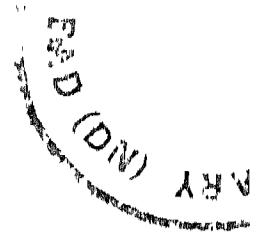
## *Acknowledgments*

To our many Czech, Sudeten German and Slovak friends we should like to express our gratitude for unstinted help given to us during several years—but for their sakes we cannot thank them by name.

We also wish to thank Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, Professor Seton-Watson, Mr. Graham Hutton, Mr. David Wills, Miss Elizabeth Wiskemann, Mr. G. E. R. Geyde, Monsieur Hubert Beuve-Mery and Monsieur Louis Joxe, who have given us valuable information, criticism and encouragement.

J. G.  
J. G.





## *Prologue*

# THE ORDEAL OF THE CZECHS AND THE FUTURE OF FREEDOM

**W**E write this book because we must. We were on the spot, in Prague, from September 15th to December, 1938. We were there during the great festival of the Sokols in June and July, 1938, and just after the Germans invaded Austria; and we had been often before. We saw how the Czech people endured the ordeal of 1938. It may well be the noblest thing we shall ever see in the whole of our lives. Those who see noble sights ought to record them. That is one reason for this book.

But there are other reasons, practical reasons. The moment the Treaty of Munich was signed, most people in England and France wanted to forget Czechoslovakia: "What is the good", they said, "of crying over spilt milk? What matters is the future, and on what has to be done next nearly everyone is agreed: rearmament, national unity, national service." But is it really so simple as that? Would that it were! The grave truth is that the betrayal of Czechoslovakia puts in question the very aims for which it is reasonable for civilised people to strive. Peace is not the real issue of our time: the real issue is liberty. Most people want peace; but can they have both peace and freedom?

Everyone who is or longs to be a citizen of a free country is now face to face with four heart-searching

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problems. On each of them the evidence of Czechoslovakia is vital to any serious judgment.

First, should we risk war for freedom? Of the many people in the Western democracies who accepted the Treaty of Munich with relief, few perhaps agreed with the barefaced claim that it was "peace with honour", but a great many, having some idea of what war means —war between industrialised Great Powers—felt that anything would be better than such war. If they had seen what we saw in Prague, they might have wavered. We ourselves had long thought peace the first aim of politics; yet Prague in 1938 seemed to force us to believe that there is something even worse than war. Which is true? Is liberty worth modern war? Is peace worth vassaldom? The fate of the people of Masaryk's Czechoslovakia raises this question mercilessly and is essential to its answer.

There was, before the surrender of Czechoslovakia, an escape from this question: now there may well be no escape for any civilised person. For in September, 1938, and in the three months before there was a good chance that, if Great Britain and France had given Hitler no reason to believe that he could get Czechoslovakia without fighting them too, there would have been no war. Even if Hitler had been mad enough to fight, the war might well have been short, giving to Germany a moderate régime and to all a humane peace. But after September 21, 1938, when the Czechoslovak Government gave in to the ultimatum of the two great democracies of Western Europe, what chance is left of deterring aggression, or that war will be short?

The second problem, in fact, is this: Those countries that are still democratic have they still the power, if

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they have the will, to resist and perhaps to deter the Fascintern? How bitterly, in 1914, people of all sorts in Great Britain reproached the memory of the statesmen who had ceded Heligoland to Germany! That is nothing to the desperate bitterness with which the British people will soon reproach those who ceded to Germany Czechoslovakia—a bargain which is likely to cost hundreds of thousands of British lives, and these perhaps in vain. Many people simply did not know what they were letting go. Many said, for instance, that whatever Great Britain and France might have done, Czechoslovakia would have been quickly overrun. One day they will know what they should have known then, that Great Britain and France could have kept Poland neutral and that in that case Czechoslovakia would have held out even against Great Germany, for in hard fact the Czechoslovak Army was the finest in the world, alike for equipment, for training and for *morale*. They have thrown it away. Now, even if the democracies arm like mad at the cost of cutting their standard of life and lessening their liberties, all they will be doing is to replace the thirty-five divisions of the Czechoslovak Army and its many hundreds of first-line 'planes and crews—and even this only if the Fascist Powers have not meanwhile kept pace. Czechoslovakia had the armaments industry of a first-class Power: it is now in the hands of Hitler. At what cost in liberty and in money will Great Britain and France hold their own against a people of eighty millions with two armament industries of the first rank? And there is something the democracies cannot replace—the strategic vantage of Czechoslovakia. In losing this, they have given to Germany the chance to control all the food, oil and raw materials of Eastern Europe,

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and so, by making Germany less sensitive to blockade, gravely reduced the effect of their sea-power.

So the surrender of Czechoslovakia has made a military and strategic revolution world-wide. Its result is this: the democracies of the European area are not strong enough to deter aggression, unless they make their home front defences strong enough to leave even dictators no hope of a short war. If this is not enough to make war its own deterrent, as much for the dictatorships as for the democracies, then any war is likely to be an all-in war of totalitarian attrition, destroying too much of European civilisation for rebirth, unless America is clearly ready to defend all democracies without delay. What is this but collective security once more?—only this time the crying need is for a collective security that must jump the Atlantic, and Great Britain is not the lordly chooser between non-intervention and resistance to aggression, Great Britain is the China or the Czechoslovakia to be.

The practical result is a hard choice. Rather than risk being bombed, rather than endure paralysing uncertainty and gruelling effort only perhaps to be treated by America as they treated the Czechs, will Great Britain and France accept a peace like the peace the Czechs accepted—that is, become the vassals of a people ruled by brutes? They may—but they should study the fate of the Czechs first. If they decide to defend themselves, they must do their best to win help from the United States. This means that they must do two things. They must make their defences as efficient as they can without giving up democratic freedom, for the United States will not help those who do not help themselves. And they must show themselves ready to fight not for their possessions only but for an ideal;

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for without that there is no chance that the United States will be ready to fight beside them again. There is one ideal, one only, which may have power to make democracies on both sides of the wide Atlantic face war again together,—the ideal of a world where small nations can live in freedom beside great nations: in fact, the unachieved aim of the Great War. (One part of this vital ideal must be to remake a genuinely independent Czechoslovakia.) The most dangerous, as well as the most evil, of all the “consequences of Munich” are its moral consequences. At Munich England and France destroyed what remained of that which millions of English and French and American soldiers had offered their lives to create. European democracy will perish and the United States run into grave danger if they do not show themselves ready to fight together again for the “war aims” of the last war.

Again? After such costly failure? Nobody could work for this without first trying to solve two further problems—the third and fourth of the four. The third problem is this: Is democracy a worthy aim at all? Has it not had its chance and proved itself a failure, even a shameful failure? Can anyone believe in democracy after Munich?

At the end of the World War the democracies had the world before them: they had a real chance to put into practice the new order they had professed to be fighting for. To set against the hideous losses and hatred caused by the War, they had the League of Nations and a republican Germany. They destroyed both. The United States deserted the League without trying it. The two great democracies of Western Europe refused to the Republic of Weimar what they

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allowed to the Terror of Hitler. They betrayed republican Germany, Manchuria, social-democratic Vienna, Abyssinia, Spain, China and Czechoslovakia. Sanctity of treaties; rights of small nations, open diplomacy, general disarmament—the very Powers who sent myriads of their men to death for these aims have betrayed these aims and those men. Those men were fools. They should have stayed at home. Perhaps the next lot will. If the democracies are doomed, they are doomed deservedly. Is it honest to incite people to risk their lives for democracies that have dishonoured themselves and for a system that has failed?

And yet—what is the alternative to the strife for democracy? Local variants of Nazi Germany. At least the so-called democracies are better than that. At least in a democracy there are no concentration camps, no pogroms, no need for people to fear that their closest friends—even their children—may be spies and informers, no whole generation of young people with next to nothing in their heads but a pagan worship of the State and a lust for Jew-baiting and domination. Above all, there is in a democracy at least some freedom of the Press, and criticism has some power to get things changed. Although sometimes democratic countries do acts of cruelty that are worthy of the Nazis, and allow inhuman exploitation and misery among their workers, yet sooner or later someone exposes the evil and starts a protest which may get it put right. Where there is democracy there is hope. This means that everyone who wants to be better than an animal must work for a democratic world, if only there is a real chance that democracies will not always in practice fail and betray. But is there that chance?

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Here the Czechoslovak Republic of Masaryk and Beneš has essential evidence to give.

President Masaryk said to Karel Čapek: "The new Europe is like a laboratory built over the great graveyard of the World War, a laboratory which needs the work of all. And democracy—modern democracy—is in its infancy."<sup>1</sup> There has been an explosion in the laboratory, but modern democracy remains a new experiment which it is vital to repeat until it succeeds. What is this modern democracy? Masaryk explains: "Democratic States", he says, "have hitherto kept up, in greater or lesser degree, the spirit and the institutions of the old régime out of which they arose. They have been mere essays in democracy; nowhere has it been consistently applied. Only the really new States, the States of the future, will be founded, inwardly and outwardly, on liberty, equality and fraternity."<sup>2</sup> Is this true? At first sight not, because Great Britain, for instance, has mixed parliamentarism with monarchy and has, by keeping up many old traditions and institutions, gained a stability that has carried many liberties. And yet, look closer. Who threw Czechoslovakia to the wolves? Not the ordinary people of Great Britain: nobody told them or called Parliament until the ultimatum of September 21st had already wrung out the Czechoslovak submission. Not the ordinary people of France: they too were not consulted about that decisive ultimatum. Though both peoples rejoiced wildly when the apparent threat of war passed away for a while, yet they showed themselves ready to resist: most people who saw it agree that the French mobilisation was sublime, for the people were at once resolute and

<sup>1</sup> *President Masaryk tells his Story*, by Karel Čapek, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> *The Making of a State*, by T. G. Masaryk, p. 436.

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resigned; and in London those who fled to the country were mostly of the class that is supposed to set an example. Great Britain had a Government which had won the election of November, 1935, on the policy of upholding the League of Nations, only to propose the partition of Abyssinia a bare month later. Those who exerted the real power in England allowed the interests of their class to blind them to the nation's interests, and in their fear and hatred of Bolshevism—that ghost—they encouraged and shielded the real and glowing danger, the Fascintern. In Spain they went on and on denying to a lawful Government the right to buy munitions, while German and Italian technicians and troops were free to take key positions gravely menacing the communications and even the cities of Great Britain and France. And Czechoslovakia—why did Czechoslovakia surrender? Chiefly because the real rulers of Great Britain and France had given to President Beneš grounds for fearing that Czechoslovakia, the least Bolshevik country in Europe, would become the target of an anti-Bolshevik crusade. The true lesson of 1938 is that in the great democracies of Western Europe the peoples had not the rulers they thought they had: the Cliveden Set and the Two Hundred Families had the power when it came to the point. When the leading article of *The Times* of September 7th advocated the partition of Czechoslovakia, the British Government repudiated the article and then enforced the partition. Democracy has not failed, for it has hardly been tried; the peoples have not betrayed, for they have not been trusted. France and Great Britain have failed and betrayed because they were not fully enough democracies. What ordinary people need is not an alternative to democracy, but a

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real democracy—a democracy democratic enough to be clearly worth defending.

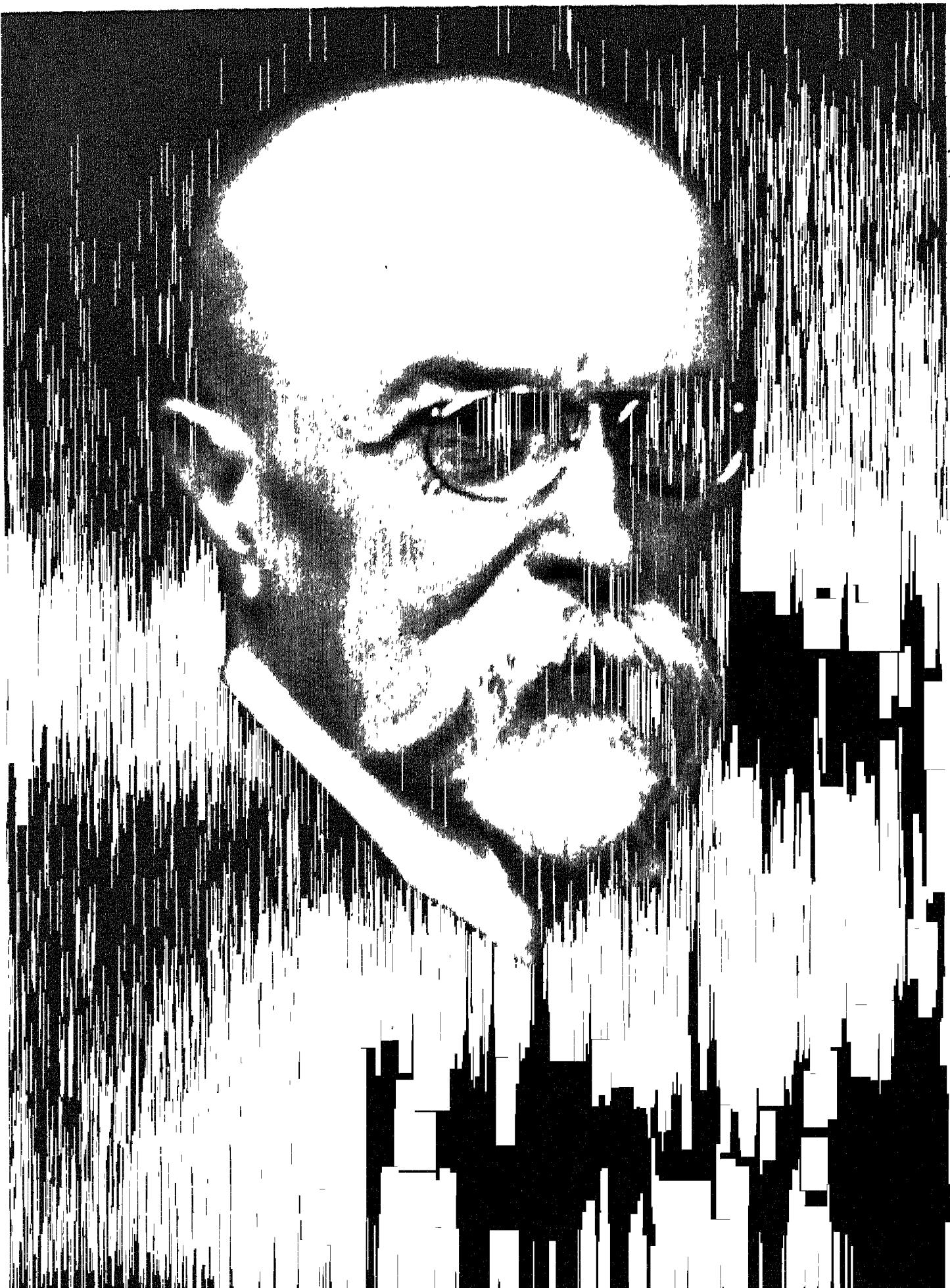
The First Czechoslovak Republic tried for twenty years to carry out in practice this ideal of Masaryk. It had “no dynasty, no national aristocracy, no old militarist tradition in the army, and no Church politically recognised in the way the older States recognised it”.<sup>1</sup> As a new State in a world still suffering badly from the spiritual and economic effects of a colossal war, Masaryk’s Republic had to face a legion of problems. It started with a land reform—far from ideal, but necessary; it built up a highly expert army that was yet a people’s army; it played a part out of all proportion to its size in the first experiment of a League of Nations; it treated its minorities better than any other State in Europe; it stood out as a steadfast democracy in an exposed position among militarist dictatorships, while country after country wavered and turned coat; it was on the way to solving even the Sudeten German problem, when foreign intervention stopped it; and in the end it betrayed nobody; it went down through the faults of others rather than through its own, and its people sustained a discipline and courage which are an immortal inspiration to all peoples still free. Though its fate is wretched, many people would be happier if they could think all this of their own country.

This is not a claim that Czechs were all angels and the Republic of Masaryk an earthly paradise. “In the past”, Masaryk wrote, “our democratic aims were negative, a negation of Austrian absolutism. Now they must be positive . . . and it will not be easy.” Free after three centuries of Austrian rule, the Czechs

<sup>1</sup> *The Making of a State*, by T. G. Masaryk, *loc. cit.*

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had their chauvinists, who were just as silly and dangerous as English or French or American chauvinists; they insisted, for instance, on grabbing Těšín in 1920 and on pin-pricking the Sudeten Germans during many precious years. The land reform, an essential and difficult work of social justice, was sometimes unjust to Hungarians and Germans, and out of it some Czechs made fortunes. There was a good deal of corruption in Czechoslovak politics, especially after the cynical Švehla gained power. Big new vested interests grew up—hardly an improvement on an old aristocracy—and the Agrarian Party came to represent these rather than the peasants and small farmers. This Agrarian Party, to make reaction stronger, helped Henlein to become powerful, and so has some guilt for the country's catastrophe. Proportional representation meant in practice that one Government after another was a coalition, and one result was that each ministry became for years the preserve of a political party. Czechoslovakia also inherited from Austria one of the most bureaucratic bureaucracies in the world. And there was a censorship of the Press which, though it allowed great freedom, was sometimes unfair and petty. But Czechoslovakia is now worth urgent study just because it tried to be a genuine democracy in the real world. Humanly imperfect and bent about by reality, still it was a genuine democracy; with all its faults, it was a very good place to be in. What makes the difference between a democracy and a tyranny is that a tyranny assumes that Man is made for the State, while a democracy tries to carry out the idea that the State is made for Man; and the test of a democracy is the people—how free they are in fact, how awake to what is going on, how



*Wide World Photo*

Dr. Thomas Masaryk



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humane, brave and disciplined. By this test the First Czechoslovak Republic rose very high—so high that it may make all the difference to the future, to what aims civilised people can still sanely pursue. For the Republic of Masaryk and Beneš has perhaps proved that democracy is even now worth defending.

But there is still a fourth great problem confronting everyone who wishes to live in a land of wide freedom. Can a democracy be ready for modern war and remain a democracy? Can human freedom survive even the threat of modern war, let alone war itself?

Czechoslovakia in 1938 was more ready for defence than any other country—yet was still a democracy. By September, 1938, Great Britain had less than forty up-to-date anti-aircraft guns to defend the whole of South-East England, and less than twenty of these had their crews and instruments complete: yet Czechoslovakia had plenty of modern anti-aircraft batteries. In 1938, still, those who said that Great Britain had better, as a defence against bombers, disperse many vital factories and split them into small insulated buildings, were looked on as cranks: yet Czechoslovakia had already done it. The Germans had let their railways go out of repair and short of rolling-stock: the Czechs had built new railways to fill their lack of lines running east and west. When the Germans overran Austria, very many units lost their way: in the Czechoslovak Army every soldier was trained to move across country by map. Czechoslovakia had the best fortifications of Europe—even on their southern frontier they were so far ready that an English observer pronounced those south of Brno the most ingenious he had ever seen. There were two grave exceptions to the readiness of the Czechs, but both of them were due

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to diplomacy: on the fatal September 21st their Polish frontier was not ready for defence, and Great Britain and France had prevented them from mobilising. Morally, they were ready, as they showed again and again, in March, in May, in June, above all in September; those people had no illusions about Hitlerism, and they had a real democracy to defend. There were grave exceptions here too—those who followed Hlinka and Beran and Stříbrný and Henlein have a heavy load of guilt, for they gave to Hitler and to his English and French friends the chance to use the ideal of self-determination against Beneš (of all people) and for National Socialists (of all people). None the less, it was desertion by others, not military weakness, that they helped to cause; it took a Chamberlain and a Bonnet to make them disastrous; and from September 16th to 30th, 1938, Czechoslovakia was wholly ready and united, even though there had been races as well as parties to divide her. Czechoslovakia has proved that a country can effectively prepare to help deter from war an industrialised and regimented Great Power and still be genuinely democratic.

But if war should come, could the democracies win it and still be democratic at the end? What many fear is that another great war will not only massacre millions of men, women and children and devastate a great part of the most beautiful things made by men, but also generate such hatred that the peoples of the democracies will become no better than the Nazis, and the peace will be vindictive. Is this inevitable? First, war is not the only danger to the “invisible things of the spirit which are the essence of a community and civilisation”: <sup>1</sup> vassaldom also may destroy them. The things of the

<sup>1</sup> Professor Arnold J. Toynbee in *Foreign Affairs*, January, 1939.

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spirit are in a bad way in after-Munich Czechoslovakia—especially in Slovakia: they would be in mortal danger if the Czechoslovak Republic had betrayed France instead of being betrayed. And many have said that in Republican Spain, in Madrid especially, the war ennobled the people: certainly we saw the Czechoslovak people rise to great nobility when they thought war imminent. Secondly, between 1918 and 1938 a spiritual revolution happened in Europe—all European peoples changed their attitude to war. They do not go to war lightly, as they did in 1914: they know now what war must mean. But why should this new force of popular realism, which made France and England rejoice wildly at the news of Munich and made Chamberlain even more a hero than victorious Hitler to the German people, exert itself only in the event of peace and have no effect in a war? Consider the contrast between the mobilisations of 1938 and the mobilisations of 1914: in 1938, in France, the men joined up at once, but very soberly, sure that it must be done, but loathing it; there was none of the unreal junketing of 1914. Even the Czechs, though to them mobilisation meant freedom—freedom from an experience worse than warfare—raced soberly to arms: they had illusions about their friends, but not about warfare. In 1938 the Rupert Brooke spirit was dead: in the classes with great possessions something even less admirable replaced it, but the courage of the peoples had become a thoughtful courage. The belligerent peoples of the next war will be very different from the belligerent peoples of 1914. The peoples' understanding of what war means is a thing too deep not to last through a war. It will last on, opposing the natural and artificial blasts of hate. The peoples will fight on,

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but they will think as they fight—they will think critically of that for which they are fighting, and they will insist on a next peace worth keeping. Can human nature do the two things at once? The Czechs have shown that—in a genuine democracy—it can. Within a bare twenty years the Czechs so subdued their chauvinism that through all the long ordeal of 1938, menaced by Germany, insulted by Germany, edged from concession to concession by their friends and then deserted, they remained hateless and humane. By their nobility the Czechs have shown that if only the democracies are democratic there is a chance of a fair peace one day.

Everybody who will not accept as inevitable a *Pax Fascistica* has to face these heart-searching problems: should we risk war for liberty? Can liberty survive even the threat of modern war? Are the democracies in fact strong enough to deter or resist a fascist coalition? Is democracy, after all its shameful failures, still worth defending? The solution of all of them depends mainly on how far the democratic Great Powers will be genuinely democratic. Czechoslovakia is only the first victim of Munich. One day Great Britain must play the part of Czechoslovakia, with the Americans in the role of the “western democracies”. Let us study the strength of the Czechs, for we may all need it.

### *Note*

Just as we were finishing this book, Hitler invaded Bohemia and Moravia, occupied Prague, and let the Gestapo loose upon the Czechs. At first sight it may seem that this crowning horror has rendered obsolete

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some parts of this book—those which deal with the details of the Munich Agreement, of the Fifth and Sixth Zones and of how the Czechs endured them. But in fact these details are far from obsolete. For the German invasion of Bohemia and Moravia was not only one of Herr Hitler's many breaches of faith, it was also an inseparable consequence of what was done at Munich. The essence of what Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier did at Munich (we give documentary evidence of this) was to trick the Czechs out of their defences and then to leave them to settle their affairs alone with Hitler. Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier therefore share responsibility with Herr Hitler for everything that Hitler may do to the Czechs and Sudeten Germans, since it was they who gave these people to the mercy of a man who had already shown himself merciless. Any-one who simply looks at the outrage of March, 1939, and at the horrors that are following it, without looking back at the crisis of September, 1938, and at its first consequences, will get a quite false idea of what caused the tragedy and of what is necessary if other tragedies are to be avoided.

When writing of the Sudeten districts, we have often used the German rather than the Czech names of towns and villages because they are more familiar to English readers. For the same reason, in translating from documents of the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior we have usually changed names from the original Czech into German.

We have made no attempt to translate these documents of the Ministry of the Interior into elegant English, for we feel that commonplace official style should be left to speak for itself.



*PART I*

INSIDE CZECHOSLOVAKIA



## *Chapter I*

### BACKGROUND TO BERCHTESGADEN

SEPTEMBER 15th, 1938. In the aeroplane leaving Marseilles for Prague there were only two other passengers. One, a young Englishman kept himself to himself, read Aldous Huxley, and got out at Geneva. The other was a Czech doctor from Karlsbad, a reserve officer hurrying home to join his regiment. He had left his wife and children in Karlsbad three weeks before. Had they been beaten up and driven out by Henlein's storm-troopers? Had they been able to flee? If they fled, where were they? It was through this man that we first directly tasted the bitter distrust which Lord Runciman, by spending most of the week-ends of his Czechoslovak Mission with Sudeten-German aristocrats, had awakened in the ordinary Czech.

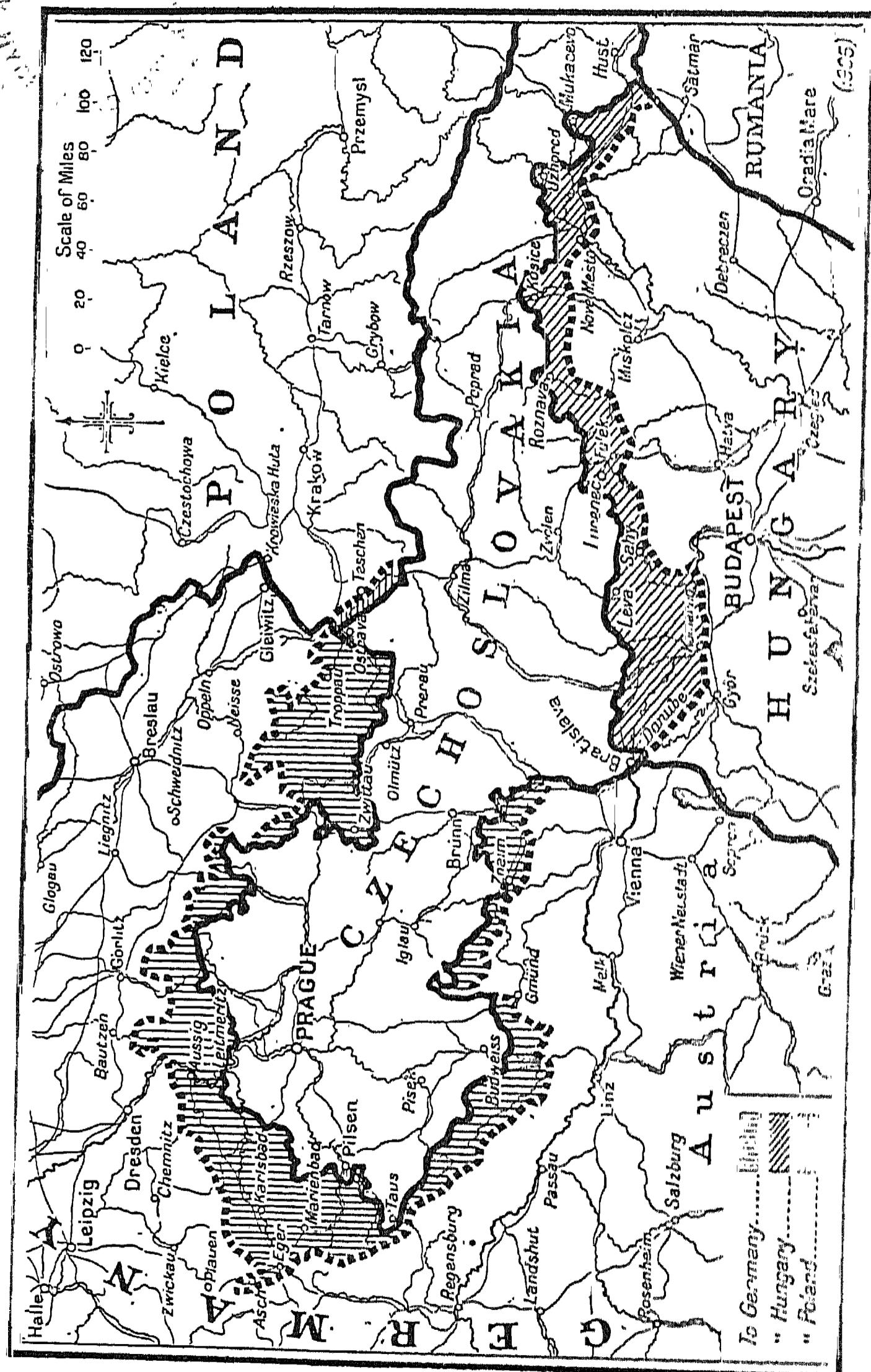
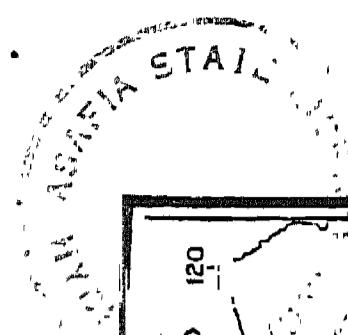
At Zurich the aeroplane filled up. There were no empty places. It was the war correspondents making for Prague. We crossed the Czech frontier districts at a great height, for only the day before Henlein's boys had fired on Major Sutton-Pratt, one of the British military observers in the Sudeten land. Our pilots had revolvers. They laughed about them, knowing that the sight of a couple of policemen's helmets was enough to take the spirit out of most Henleinists.

At Ruzyně airport one of our best friends, an official of the Czech Foreign Office, met us. If we had still

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had any doubts that the situation was desperate, one look at his face would have blown them away. Living for over five years next door to danger, these people had developed strong nerves and few illusions, so that in past crises—the Rhineland, the Anschluss, May 21st—Prague had always been an inspiring contrast to London, where the habit was to think a coming crisis no business of England's, and then to panic when it came. But this time our friend was afraid. "The French Cabinet is divided," he said at once, "it's nearly even—eight to seven. *On va nous lâcher.*" After that news, the news, also grave enough, that Henlein had fled to Germany, calling on his followers to rebel and secede, seemed relatively unmoving.

The streets of Prague were terribly changed. Less than three months ago we had seen them in the Sokol festival, gaudy with the flags and peasant dresses of a dozen different peoples and of a hundred different regions—Roumanians in astrakhan busbies, Bosnian Moslems in frilly white drawers, Bulgarians in workaday khaki and white lamb caps, boys from Moravian Slovakia with hats like decorated Christmas-trees, girls from Bohemia, from Moravia, from Slovakia, from Ruthenia and Roumania, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bulgarians, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Esthonians, Ukrainians, White Russians, American Czechs and Slovaks, all being photographed, all photographing each other, all photographing Prague, all buying shoes from Bat'a, all buying stockings—above all, stockings, all the stockings in Prague. Now the streets were nearly empty under a clammy grey sky. A few people stood about reading newspapers, their faces grey. They knew that Chamberlain had gone to Berchtesgaden. They felt that they were being sold.



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Consider what the Czech people had already been through. In the six months since the invasion of Austria, they had scarcely known a day's respite. They were more nearly surrounded than ever, and in the way in which the Austrian Nazis had played the Trojan Horse they had seen an image of their own Nazis; then they had seen two of the three German parties in the Government of the Republic fall over each other to join Henlein before it was too late. In April, Henlein had announced and the German press had trumpeted the "Karlsbad demands", demands that Czechoslovakia should turn herself into an Austria. On May 21st, when invasion seemed imminent, the Czechoslovak Army manned the frontiers in record time. This made the people proud; and the Sokol festival made them feel that they were not alone, that there really was a great Slav brotherhood of which they were part; yet they knew that Hitler would soon attack again. The Press and wireless of the Third Reich howled lies and insults at them every day. Then came Lord Runciman, sent to Prague, as the Czech people suspected, against the wishes of their Government, treating the Sudeten German problem as a simple internal question, extorting concession after concession, a third plan, a fourth plan. The fourth plan was so clearly dangerous that only Beneš, with his exceptional authority, could make them accept it. What was their reward? A leading article of *The Times* proposing the partition of Czechoslovakia; Field-Marshal Göring's abuse ("these ridiculous puppets, this bit of a people, nobody knows where they come from"); Hitler's speech of September 12th; and then, within half an hour of Hitler's last words, Henlein's louts loose in the Sudetenland, looting, beating and murdering.

## BACKGROUND TO BERCHTESGADEN

On Monday evening, the 12th of September, the Sudeten German leaders were still ostensibly negotiating with Lord Runciman; indeed, the Ministry of the Interior in Prague was told by telephone from Eger at six o'clock that:

All the leaders of the S.d.P.<sup>1</sup> are in Asch this evening with Konrad Henlein and are expecting a conversation with Lord Runciman. At five o'clock this afternoon Mr. Gwatkin spoke by telephone with the S.d.P. representatives in Asch. Lord Runciman has been informed that children have been fired on in Eger and that there was a terrible massacre, with many hundreds of dead, mostly children.<sup>2</sup>

No such massacre, of course, ever took place. On the contrary it was the S.d.P. which had demonstrated and rioted throughout the day and for many days past. On September 9th the police in Bodenbach had reported to Prague at 8.30 P.M.:

A Communist meeting began in the hall of the Bodenbach *Volkshaus* at eight o'clock; Czechs are taking part in it. Next door to the *Volkshaus* is the *Deutsches Haus* in front of which about 800 S.d.P. members have gathered, chiefly youths. . . .

At nine o'clock the police station reported:

The crowd has now increased to 3000 people. The crowd on the pavement completely fills Teplitzstrasse and is shouting: "Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer!" and singing "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles", and the Horst Wessellied; they are shouting

<sup>1</sup> Sudetendeutsch Partei.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 1379/38, Section C.

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“*Drauf*”, meaning on the *Volkshaus*. The crowd nearest the *Volkshaus* began to attack the police, and threw stones, and glasses and chairs from the nearby open-air restaurant. Two policemen were wounded.

The leader of the local *Ordners*, Hasse, was seen urging on the crowd against the police, and shouting: “*Ihr Feiglinge, ihr wollt ausreissen*”.

After the two policemen were wounded, the police began to clean up Teplitzstrasse with rubber truncheons. They succeeded in pushing the crowd back into the Poststrasse.

At 10.30 P.M. the station reported:

At ten o'clock Dr. Kreisl of Poststrasse climbed on to the balcony of one of the houses and made a speech. He said:

“Comrades, the aim of our demonstration has been achieved. I can only wonder that to-day, when it is already absolutely clear that the territory belongs to us (*das Gebiet uns gehört*), such a ridiculous little Marxist group should have been allowed to have a meeting. Your discipline has been wonderful, and through it our meeting has achieved its object. I ask you now to go quietly and orderly to your homes. Heil our leader, Konrad Henlein!”

His appeal to separate was obeyed. As the crowd went home two Czechs and a German Social Democrat were attacked and wounded; they were insulted by the attackers.<sup>1</sup>

On the eleventh the Brno police reported that an arms cache had been discovered in a disused church at Valašské Meziříčí. The cache contained:

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 1285/38, Section C.

## BACKGROUND TO BERCHTESGADEN

two new Brownings, 7.65 calibre, trade-mark "Walter";  
six cases of cartridges, each containing twenty-five;  
five tin boxes, each containing one kilogram of gunpowder (labelled Marika mélange, Roky cany);<sup>1</sup>  
five oil cans, each containing one kilogram of gun powder (labelled Fantolin);  
ten metres of fuse cord;  
a tin box, containing a bottle of oil and a piece of flannel, the box labelled "Walter Karl Haffen-fabrik Zella".<sup>2</sup>

At Neudek on the same day crowds gathered in the streets chanting and yelling—"Wir wollen zurück ins Reich!" "Lieber Adolf, mach uns frei, von der Tschecchoslowakei!" "Lieber Führer, komm herein, sperr die roten Hunde ein!" The Volkshaus and the police station were attacked; Czech and Jewish shops were destroyed, four police were wounded. Throughout the 11th and 12th of September the "incidents" continued, growing steadily worse; at Böhmisch Krumau a crowd collected in the market-place on the afternoon of the 12th, threw stones, fired at the police and wounded a policeman; at Schwaderbach, right on the frontier, S.d.P. *Ordnung* captured the gendarmerie station and imprisoned the gendarmes; one gendarme was killed, three wounded; the imprisoned gendarmes and customs officers were shut up in the icehouse of the Gasthaus Fischer; at Markhausen the telephone wires were cut, the gendarmerie station occupied and set on fire, two gendarmes and four customs officers imprisoned; at Plan,

<sup>1</sup> I.e. with a jam label. Fantolin is a Czech petrol.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 1335/38, Section C.

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near Marienbad, rioters captured the gendarmerie station and wounded three gendarmes; at Haselbach two gendarmes and a customs officer were murdered. Everywhere handfuls of exhausted, overworked police and gendarmes had to face mobs of hysterical Sudeten Germans, usually outnumbering them by at least two hundred to one, armed and supported from across the frontier. The police were not sent sufficient reinforcements, they were told not to fire on demonstrators, they were not allowed to call upon help from the military. They were perpetually harassed by the Ministry of the Interior, which implored them "to do nothing to aggravate the situation", because the Ministry of the Interior was itself harassed by the French and British governments in the same sense. The result was the brigandage and loss of life of the 13th and 14th of September.

The correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* in Prague, who made a tour of the Sudeten districts on those two days, wrote on Tuesday night, the 13th:

The prearranged signal for the outbreak was the conclusion of the Hitler speech, and throughout the Sudeten areas the same plan of operation was followed.

The Henleinists were ordered to gather in companies, small or large, to hear the speech. At its conclusion the Storm Troopers under their regulation leaders, who donned swastika armlets, marched into the streets, followed by party supporters, and began their work of demolition, plunder and revolt.

I have personally ascertained that this was the procedure followed in Karlsbad, Eger, Falkenau and Asch, all of which I visited to-day. . . .

## BACKGROUND TO BERCHTESGADEN

In Karlsbad there had been extraordinary vandalism among the fashionable shops. Dozens of establishments bearing Czech or Jewish names had holes in their windows where stones had been hurled through before plundering started.

Henleinist storm-troopers in uniform were dashing about on motor-cycles, some flying the swastika, others the Henleinist party pennant. When I tried to photograph the damage at one place, two Henleinist boys of 17 or 18 forbade me and placed themselves in front of the gaping window. But when I told them that I should take the picture and have their faces on record as well they disappeared hastily. . . .

Beyond Karlsbad, in the hamlet of Chlodau, every available space was painted with swastikas. Huge swastika banners flew from many houses. Everywhere the Henleinists greeted me with Hitler salutes and shouted threats when they were not returned. . . .

At Falkenau I saw two gendarmes hard-pressed by a mob of swastika-badged Henleinists retreating down the street holding their bayonets in front of them.

It seemed to be carrying self-restraint on the part of the Czechs to the limit when they discovered on leaving the town that the barracks on the outskirts were full of troops who were not allowed to go out.

Storm-troopers wearing swastika armlets tried to stop my car, shouting, "Hold him up, hold him up". But I accelerated and drove hard at them and got through.

About six miles further on towards the frontier a dozen Henleinists with swastika armlets waiting at the side of the road gave me the Hitler salute, and when I failed to reply greeted my open car with a

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shower of stones, and I had to duck my head and accelerate. My car bore some marks of the encounter.

The stone-throwing was repeated on the same spot on my return journey, but being prepared with the hood up and windows closed I was able to drive hard at the Henleinists and make them scatter. . . .

On the return journey, passing through Franzensbad I saw a crowd of three or four hundred people looking at a swastika banner on the church tower. Three minutes later I met a motor-coach filled with gendarmes who were going to restore order in Eger. I turned my car and followed them to see the effect on the crowd gazing at the swastika.

They vanished immediately. It was almost impossible to believe that several hundred people could disappear with such rapidity. . . . At the entrance to Karlsbad the same thing had occurred. Here also martial law was in force, but I only saw one thin line of police with rifles and bayonets walking quietly through the streets. I followed them for a while and saw that whenever they turned a corner people did not so much run as just cease to be there.

I lay particular emphasis on the fact that the mere sight of a police helmet suffices to restore order, because it is part of the Henleinist propaganda to suggest that the Czech authorities have lost all control. This is absolutely untrue.

Last night, apparently in accordance with the wishes of foreign advisers, they gave orders that no resistance was to be offered to the rioters. The result was terror which need never have been and great damage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, September 14th, 1938.

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The stream of reports and telephone messages flowing into Prague from local gendarmerie stations, frontier guards and Chief Constables are terrible to read. At 11 p.m. on the 13th the *Zemský Úřad*<sup>1</sup> in Prague reported that

on the 13th September, 1938, about 12 o'clock the gendarmerie station in Habersbirk (Falkenau district) was attacked. The sergeant Jan Koukal was shot, the gendarmes Křepela and Černý beaten to death with axes, and the gendarme Roubal was also killed. No further reports have arrived yet.<sup>2</sup>

At 3.45 on the morning of the 14th Komotau reported the murder of a young Czech electrician, Ladislav Krejčí, "probably from political motives", between 11.45 and midnight on the 13th:

The murder was committed on the road from Komotau to Prague. . . . The doctor who examined the body found a gunshot wound made by a bullet of 1.35 mm. calibre right through the heart, two wounds in the head and one in the main artery. Five empty revolver cartridges were found on the ground. The dead man was on his motor cycle; it is clear from the position of his body that he was killed as the motor cycle stopped. In his right hand he held a revolver, from which no shots had been fired. It is clear that the dead man was stopped on the road by several men, and when he pulled at his revolver five shots were fired at him point-blank. All his possessions were left with

<sup>1</sup> *Zemský Úřad* has no parallel in England; it is a kind of head police office for Bohemia (the province), under the Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 1390/38, Section C.

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him, so that it is obviously a political murder. The dead Krejčí gave information to the State police from time to time.<sup>1</sup>

During the morning of the 14th at Habersbirk there was a regular battle between 2000 S.d.P. and the gendarmerie; on the S.d.P. side there were 28 dead; 14 gendarmes were killed. At Schwaderbach the remaining gendarmes and customs officers were dragged away to Germany, and put in the hands of the Gestapo. From Eger, early in the evening, came a series of frantic telephone calls from the railway officials:

- (1) "Eger is attacked. Send reinforcements. There is shooting. S.d.P. party is attacking the town. Police are resisting. Urgently need military reinforcements."
- (2) "Police are attacked. There is firing from machine-guns. We are all threatened. We are all in danger. We want military help. We can't take dispatches."
- (3) "We are in the dark. The shots are flying over our heads. We want urgently military help."<sup>2</sup>

At 8.20 P.M. the police reported from Eger:

As there was reason for suspicion that a large store of arms was hidden in the Hotels Victoria and Wälzel, the S.d.P. centres, two divisions of police, accompanied by three armoured cars, were sent at 7.30 P.M. to make a search of the hotels. As they arrived the armoured cars were greeted by firing

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Interior, Document No. 1425/38, Section C.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Interior, Document No. 1425/38, Section C.

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from the second floor of the Hotel Wälzel, and there were shots from the cellar of the same hotel and from the cellar of the Hotel Victoria. The firing was from machine-guns. Both armoured cars opened fire on the two hotels. At eight o'clock the police, using hand-grenades, succeeded in breaking down the doors of the Hotel Victoria and penetrating inside. In the Hotel Victoria they captured only Georg Leicht, employed by the S.d.P. in Prague, and sent to Eger from Prague. Inside the hotel they found a large number of automatic pistols of Reichsgerman manufacture which had been smuggled into Czechoslovakia, three other pistols and a large store of cartridges, and a complete and well fitted up broadcasting station. Leicht confessed that there were about ten people with him in the hotel, but that they fled before the arrival of the police. Among them he named a certain Karl, who lay on a table and fired a sub-machine-gun through the window. He also named a certain Dr. Jeník. According to his information there is a secret corridor in the hotel which these people used for their escape.

Opposite the hotel there is a petrol pump, where four dead men were found lying with their faces towards the Hotel Wälzel. They were obviously killed by shots from the hotel. They are the policeman Klener, and lying on his right the railwayman Bláha, holding in his hand the policeman's rifle. It is therefore probable that Klener was killed before Bláha; next to him was a civilian, the keeper of the petrol pump, German nationality. A little further on, in the centre of the space was the van of the *Egerer Zeitung* and its dead driver, also lying with his face towards the Hotel Wälzel.

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About 9.40, when the firing from the Hotel Wälzel had stopped, the police went to the gate of the hotel, rang the bell and the hotel staff let them in. In the hotel they found no one except the hotel personnel, no firearms and no ammunition.

They also found two more dead people, a man and a woman, lying in a corner of the steps leading to the station. Also, from the evidence, shot from the Hotel Wälzel. The Hotel Victoria is only slightly damaged by the firing, and the Hotel Wälzel still less.

In the town all was quiet during the battle. People stayed at home and did not go out into the streets. It is characteristic that when people met a policeman, they put both hands above their heads as a sign that they had no arms.<sup>1</sup>

At 9.5 p.m. Warnsdorf police reported:

On the 14th of September at 8.15 p.m. a crowd of about 2000 people gathered in the Warnsdorf Haupstrasse. From the conversations that have been overheard the crowd intends to cross the frontier by the customs house Warnsdorf VII, and to demonstrate there. According to other conversations which were overheard, an S.d.P. member also called on other members to go to the *Turnhalle* in Warnsdorf, where arms were being given out. There is in fact a steady stream of people going in and out of the *Turnhalle*. Neither the hall of the *Turnhalle* nor the entrance are lighted. The [gendarmerie] station here cannot interfere as it has at its disposition only three gendarmes, the other three being to-day occupied in an investigation on the frontier below

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 1432/38, Section C.

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Spitzberg. The frontier guard captured three armed men.

The chief of the station this morning called the attention of Deputy Rössler to the ban on political meetings and asked him to use all his authority to prevent demonstrations which were, according to reports, to take place this afternoon. Deputy Rössler promised to do this. But at 8.50 p.m. he informed the station by telephone in an excited voice that he could no longer do it, that he could no longer control the crowd, and could in no way prevent the demonstrations. He says that they are the spontaneous outbreaks of a crowd asking for the right of self-determination. When asked again, he promised to try again to compel the demonstrators to disperse to prevent other outbreaks. This afternoon Major Voženílek<sup>1</sup> informed us by telephone that if it should be urgently necessary the station may ask the garrison commander in Böhmisch-Leipa to send armoured cars, that is to say, military assistance. The garrison in Böhmisch-Leipa informed us by telephone that they cannot interfere, and therefore this station cannot interfere, we will limit ourselves to observing and will give telephone reports. . . .

Demonstrators from Warnsdorf went to the frontier barriers and are negotiating with the frontier officials to cross into Germany. At the frontier there are motor cars with S.A. men, and reflectors lighting up the barriers. Reichsgerman customs officers are in full field equipment.<sup>2</sup>

On September 15th at 2 a.m. Prague received a report from Sebastiansberg:

<sup>1</sup> A police, not an army, officer.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 1437/38, Section C.

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To-day, September 15th, at one o'clock in the morning, the gendarme Jan Heřmánek, who was accompanied by the soldier Laburda, noticed in the square of Sebastiansberg an unknown cyclist with an *Ordner's* cap, making rounds in the town in a very suspicious manner. When he was stopped the cyclist immediately jumped off his bicycle and began to shoot. The gendarme Heřmánek was killed immediately by a shot in the mouth from a distance of one metre. The soldier Laburda was wounded in the stomach. The clerk Otto Pešek was also wounded in the leg. The culprit escaped; the frontier authorities have been warned.<sup>1</sup>

It was to this Sudeten German Party, an organisation of traitors and terrorists, that Lord Runciman and his staff were pressing the Czechoslovak Government to make the most trusting concessions. Lord Runciman in his letter of September 21st,<sup>2</sup> although admitting that the riots were "provoked and instigated" by the extremists of the S.d.P., actually recommended that the Czech police and military should be withdrawn from the Sudeten districts, the S.d.P. itself being charged with keeping order. Keeping order! Gangs of young hooligans who were ready to loot Czech or Jewish shops, to lock up terrified women and children, to beat up and kidnap German Socialists and Communists, to hack off the hands of a Czech postmaster<sup>3</sup> or to shoot a solitary Czech village policeman in the back, but who were never prepared to face twenty police, a dozen soldiers or the death penalty,—these were the people

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 1433/38, Section C.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 5847, September, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> They did this at Trinksaifen, near Neudek. We cannot name the source of this story, but it has been carefully checked.

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to whom Lord Runciman and Mr. Chamberlain wished to entrust the keeping of order. In the face of a terror organised and armed by a foreign Power, the British and French Ministers in Prague were urging the Czechs to take none of the measures required to restore calm and to rescue the victims. At each disorder in the Sudeten regions a cry went up, not only from the German but from a part of the British Press, that the Czechoslovak Government was not master in its own house; yet those who supported this outcry opposed the Czechs when they wished to take firm measures.

When the Czechs did at last take firm measures, disorder died down at once. On the morning of Tuesday, the 13th, the Government proclaimed a state of martial law in eight districts—Eger, Neudek, Elbogen, Karlsbad, Falkenau, Pressnitz, Krumau and Kaaden, and on Wednesday extended it to Graslitz, Joachimsthal and Bischofsteinitz, on Thursday to Komotau, Reichenberg, Rumburg, Schluckenau and Warnsdorf. By the afternoon of Thursday the 15th the rising, except for sporadic flares, was dead.

The leaders of the S.d.P. meanwhile presented an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak Government on the Tuesday afternoon: martial law must be repealed, State police must be withdrawn from all districts with a "German majority", the gendarmerie must be reduced to their "normal numbers" and confined to their "normal duties", and all troops must be confined to barracks; otherwise negotiations between the Sudeten German party and the Government would be broken off finally. The Government, having no intention of abdicating from the Sudeten districts, ignored the ultimatum. Henlein then refused to negotiate even with the long-suffering and assiduous members of the

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British Mission, who pursued him around the country, and on Thursday afternoon, the 15th, he with several of his closer friends<sup>1</sup> scuttled hastily to the security of the Reich, leaving behind an inflammatory and wordy proclamation "to the Sudeten Germans, to the German people, and to the whole world!" It said:

In this hour of Sudeten German need, I stand before you, the German people and the whole civilised world, and I declare: We wish to live as free Germans! We want peace and work in our homeland! We want to go home to the Reich! God be good to us in our righteous struggle.

In the words of next morning's *Sozialdemokrat*, the anti-Nazi daily of the Sudeten Germans, "*Der Führer ist geflohen; kämpfen soll das Volk*"—the Leader has fled, and left the fighting to the People.

This was the situation in Czechoslovakia on September 15th, when Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden.

<sup>1</sup> Including Prince Hohenlohe, whom Lord Runciman had visited.

## Chapter II

### END OF THE SUDETEN GERMAN PROBLEM?

“**D**ER Führer ist geflohen: kämpfen soll das Volk.” This, the first headline we saw on the 16th of September, was the *leit-motiv* of the next three days inside Czechoslovakia. That morning Lord Runciman and Mr. Ashton-Gwatkin left for London to tell Mr. Chamberlain that the Sudeten German problem could not be solved within the Czechoslovak Republic. At that very moment the Sudeten German problem was well on the way to being solved within the republic.

Henlein’s flight disgusted and dismayed his followers; how could they feel enthusiasm any more for leaders who urged them to rebellion from a safe retreat? A great many of them had never wanted or expected a separation from Bohemia and had never realised that that was Henlein’s policy. He had not told them so openly. To a great many Sudeten Germans the “Sudeten German problem” had been simply a question of getting rid of the Czech postman or the Czech school teacher or the Czech gendarmes, or of having rather more jobs to go round or of getting a little higher unemployment benefit. To many of them it meant being on the safe side in case Hitler came. Others wanted to feel that they still belonged to a *Herrenvolk*, and vague phrases about “autonomy” or “cantonalisation” attracted them. But the fourth plan had met

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most of these grievances amply, and even their leaders had seemed to accept it. Less than a week before, on September 9th, the S.d.P. leaders in Prague had informed the Czechoslovak Premier, Dr. Hodža, that the way for negotiations between the S.d.P. and the Government was completely free—negotiation on the basis of the Government's fourth plan. Why then should the average Sudeten Germans rebel now, deserted by their leader, with Hitler's army on the other side of a well-guarded frontier, with the Czech Army in their midst, and with one thing at last clear to them—that if revolt should broaden into war, their homes would be the first battlefield. This was not the policy for which they had given Henlein a mandate.

There is plenty of evidence of this feeling. For instance, *Bohemia*, the conservative Sudeten German newspaper which had gone over to Henlein's camp when Austria fell, deplored in its leading article of September 15th the incidents "which had compelled the spread of martial law". "The most radical group of Sudeten Germans—mostly young men—only showed by their conduct that they are heedless alike of their homeland (the first and the most threatened) and of the ever-growing danger of war—how near it is Chamberlain's sensational flight to Hitler shows all too clearly."

On the 16th *Bohemia* said:

With regard to this proclamation of Konrad Henlein's we make the following statement to our readers, whose views are already clear to us through the hundreds and hundreds of letters we are receiving daily:

With this proclamation Konrad Henlein has not only created a gulf between himself and the State,

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but also between himself and that part of the Sudeten German people who gave him their votes as *Volksführer* only on the basis of his programme at that time, a programme so wholly different. That programme declared with noteworthy insistence the loyalty and law-abidingness of the Sudeten German people. His present call to irredentism saddles the Sudeten Germans with all the consequences of treason to the State; for such a challenge these electors gave him neither their votes nor their mandate. Konrad Henlein alone is responsible for this proclamation, and not those Sudeten Germans upon whom, unasked and without any care for the consequences to them, he has tried to lay the responsibility. Moreover, even the members of the S.d.P. parliamentary club who were in Prague, and who were without communications from Eger or Asch, had no knowledge of the proclamation.

On the 17th *Bohemia* used still sharper words:

Konrad Henlein's proclamation of yesterday has had a very mixed reception in the Sudeten German districts and in S.d.P. circles. There is a more and more widespread feeling that in these modern times revolutions cannot just be called up out of the ether without the *Führer* himself appearing upon the barricades. This reaction is even clearer in the German islands than in the continuous German districts. But in the frontier districts too, not only had complete calm been re-established by Friday afternoon, but many had already gone back to their normal daily life and to their normal work.

It is quite clear that the rioting in the Sudeten dis-

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tricts did not show, as Lord Runciman and the British Cabinet seem to have believed, that the Czech-Sudeten German problem was insoluble, that Czechs and Germans could no longer live together within the boundaries of the Czechoslovak State. It showed exactly the contrary. Henlein's party was dissolved on September 16th, technically; but really it dissolved itself; once it had been made plain to his braves that the "cleaning-up" would be done by the Czech police and military, and not by them, they either melted away or ran to the nearest police station to place themselves at the disposal of the police. In Bodenbach a Henleinist mayor had a few weeks earlier replaced Herr Fritz Kessler, an able and popular Social Democrat who had been mayor for several years. On the Friday morning Herr Kessler walked into the Mayor's office. "*Ich amtiere hier* (This is *my* office)", he said to his scared successor, and pointed to the door. The Henleinist sat still for a moment, then got up without a word and walked out. Herr Kessler sat down at his desk and began his work again as if he had just returned from a holiday. The Mayor of Neuern, president of the local S.d.P., put out a joint proclamation with the Social Democrats urging the people to quiet and order, and warning them against "the lying rumours spread by an enemy propaganda". In Reichenberg the Henleinist Mayor issued a proclamation asking for discipline, emphasising the great gravity of the situation and especially warning everyone against unsubstantiated rumours. In Braunau the local S.d.P. deputy went to the *Bezirksamt* to give thanks for the bravery and exemplary conduct of the police; they had, he said, prevented great bloodshed, and in future all members of the S.d.P. would observe the laws of the republic.

## THE SUDETEN GERMAN PROBLEM

Knowing these facts, we were surprised to read Lord Runciman's judgment that "as the State Police are extremely unpopular among the German inhabitants, and have constituted one of their chief grievances for the last three years, I consider that they should be withdrawn as soon as possible. I believe that their withdrawal would reduce the causes of wrangles and riots."<sup>1</sup>

The number of Henleinist leaders and officials who hastened to assure the Czechoslovak State of their complete and eternal loyalty and their anxious desire to be of assistance was fantastic. The rectors and deans of the German University in Prague—notoriously Henleinist—the heads of the German Technical High School and a large number of Henleinist school teachers were invited to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education, where they were confronted with Henlein's proclamation and asked if they identified themselves with it. All of them, without a single exception, signed a declaration saying that they repudiated the proclamation and renewed their oath of loyalty to the Czechoslovak State. A high official in the Ministry of Education told us that of fifty-four teachers who passed through his office forty-nine signed the declaration immediately and would not even have bothered to read it had he not insisted on reading it aloud to them. Five hesitated. Four of the five signed after a few minutes' discussion; one went away by himself for half an hour to think things over. He returned at the end of the half-hour, and signed the declaration at once, without saying a word.

As for the ordinary Sudeten Germans, once freed from the Henlein terror and from the fear of a Nazi invasion, they were only too ready to come to terms

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, September, 1938.

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with the Czechoslovak Government as quickly as possible. The German Catholics and Agrarians who in March had been so anxious to join Henlein were even more anxious now to dissociate themselves from him and to join with the German Social Democrats—who had never once wavered in their loyalty to the republic, and who had fought side by side with the Czech police during the riots—and with other Democratic Groups to make a new, loyalist Sudeten German Front.

On Friday evening, September 16th, Herr Jaksch, the leader of the German Social Democrats, one of the best and bravest men in Czechoslovakia, made an eloquent appeal over the wireless “*an alle gutgesinnten*” (to all men of goodwill).

“In every party camp [he said] there are men who want the best for their people. Czechs and Germans cannot destroy each other. Every nation has its weakness, but every nation has also its great qualities. The formula for an honourable life together must be found, not only in our country but in the whole of Europe. I am quite certain that there will be enough *Lebensraum* as soon as the work of social and economic reconstruction is begun. The Sudeten Germans [he went on] can write their names with golden letters in the history of our time, if they decide for peace. It has been so willed that a part of the fate of Europe lies in our hands. . . . What a blessing for our land if it should be the beginning, the starting place of a new epoch of European peace. ‘The key lies in our hands.’”

The next day, Saturday, September 17th, a new “National Council of Sudeten Germans” was formed. It included representatives of all those Sudeten

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Germans who wished for a peaceful agreement with the Czechoslovak Government—a Catholic, an Agrarian, two German Democrats and Herr Jaksch; it had support, though much of it still secretly and timidly given, from many former members of the Henlein party. Most astonishing of all, it had the support of Dr. Lodgman von Auen, the Sudeten German leader who at the end of the Great War had been the *Landeshauptmann* of the autonomous “German Bohemia”, had fought against the incorporation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, and had led the Sudeten Germans at the time of their fiercest and bitterest quarrels with the Czechs, all through the period of their non-co-operation with the Czechoslovak State. When the German Agrarians and Catholics entered the Czechoslovak Government in 1926, Dr. Lodgman had retired from political life in bitterness and disgust. This was the man, an anti-Marxist and a Sudeten German Nationalist, supporter of Henlein almost to the very moment of the Karlsbad demands in April, who now came to Herr Jaksch’s flat to see him and to offer his help. He had known since the time of the Karlsbad speech, he said, that all would go badly, and that the S.d.P. was getting out of hand; Henlein had led the Sudeten German people to chaos. He, Lodgman, wished to support the new National Council. He was willing to co-operate with it, even if necessary to sign a manifesto, provided that the Council could find a former leader of the S.d.P. who would sign it at the same time. Herr Jaksch, surprised at this offer, suggested Kundt. Dr. Lodgman<sup>1</sup> replied that he thought Kundt

<sup>1</sup> When the German troops entered Teplitz-Schönau in October Dr. Lodgman sent effusive telegrams to Hitler, Hans Krebs, K. H. Wolf, the Mayors of Dresden and Munich, and many others.

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moderate and sensible, and he would be glad to work with him.

This happened on September 17th. What is the explanation of Dr. Lodgman's visit? Was he sent by the former S.d.P. leaders to spy on Herr Jaksch's movement? Was he afraid and in haste to cover himself? Or was he genuinely anxious to help? Herr Jaksch himself was convinced that Dr. Lodgman's offer was quite genuine; but even if it were due to corruption or fear, it is not the less important. For whatever its motive it showed that Dr. Lodgman, the godfather of Henlein's party, was sure that at this moment the National Council was powerful.

On that evening the Council issued a manifesto to the Sudeten German people. This manifesto, drafted entirely by Herr Jaksch, is one of the most statesman-like documents any Sudeten German leader ever issued. Those who signed it were a Catholic, Father Reichenberger, an Agrarian deputy, Toni Köhler, a German Democrat, Senator Kostka, the President of the German Democratic Club, Dr. Karl Sitte, and Herr Jaksch. It said:

We do not wish in these hours of stress, to dispute over responsibilities. In calmer days impartial history will judge those who allowed themselves to be celebrated as "*Führers*" throughout the country, and who at the moment of greatest affliction left their people alone and deserted. . . .

Since the days of the Přemyslids<sup>1</sup> the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia have been an element of peace and progress. Our forefathers were ploughmen, not warriors. . . . Our people will not be simply

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 79.

## THE SUDETEN GERMAN PROBLEM

mourners and the playthings of the Great Powers. We have a mission to fulfil. In this crisis it is not only a question of the Sudeten Germans, it is a question of the fate of all Germans, and of the future of Europe. The Sudeten Germans, by their whole tradition, are called to be *not* the vanguard of a “*Machtpolitik*”, but the pioneers of an understanding between the German motherland and her neighbour peoples. . . .

The fourth plan, which emerged in the course of the Prague negotiations, opens up a favourable outlook. This proposal of the Czechoslovak Government does not fulfil all the demands which the Sudeten German people can justly make. But it brings a great deal—and this the S.d.P. too, so long as it was the master of its own will, recognised—which with honourable will on both sides offers a suitable terrain for useful negotiations. The negotiations for a national-political agreement must not be wrecked. They must be carried on and brought to a happy ending. . . .

The undersigned have no wish to be reproached with a new splitting of parties and a division of our forces. . . . Disregarding all special party and personal interests, a National Council of all Sudeten Germans who wish for peace will be set up.

We do not fail to recognise that the leaders of the Czech people have a great responsibility. . . . The mistakes of twenty years of a Czech “*National-Staat*” policy must be wholly wiped out. . . . We call upon all citizens of the Republic, without distinction of nationality, not to let the work of understanding be wrecked. Mistrust on both sides must be conquered. Let us unite our goodwill and our strength

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in the struggle to keep war far from our homes, and to prepare a better future for our sorely tried people.

From the Czech side this new effort did not go unwelcomed. The Czechoslovak Government, we know on good evidence, was ready to negotiate at once and quickly with this new National Council of Sudeten Germans on the basis of the fourth plan. And Karel Čapek wrote a moving "Epistle to the Sudeten Germans" in which he said:

I have neither the right nor the power at this moment to contribute anything towards the solution of the Sudeten German question: but like every Czech, like every European, I have the right to raise another, a far more general, a far simpler and clearer question: Do you want war or peace? . . .

I say openly that I cannot imagine the face of the man who says: I want war. But, if you want peace—and here I do not appeal to parties or party leaders, but to private folk like myself—if you really want peace, peace for you and your children, peace for your people whom you love—that is enough for us. Then we shall soon get on together. Then we shall have, whatever this or that may divide us, something in common, each of us will have something to rely on: a common will for peace. Then we can work together, we can be fellow-workers, fellow-workers not only for the peace of your corner of the earth, created by nature and history, called by man "*Sudeten*", but fellow-workers for the peace of the world too. And collaborators in saving millions of beautiful lives. Those who would fall—be they Austrians or Germans—have some rights too, don't you think so?

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Was it true that Czechs and Germans could live side by side in peace in Bohemia? For those who saw the Czech reception of the early Sudeten German refugees in Prague, or in other Czech towns, it is hard to doubt. A stream of refugees from the Sudetenland began even before Hitler's speech, but during the four days afterwards it was increased ten-fold. Some of the refugees were Czechs, but these had usually friends or relations in the interior; most were Sudeten German Social Democrats and Communists, and they had nobody, they were entirely dependent on Czech charity. Women, old men, children, even young men in their working clothes—they came by every train from the frontier that landed at the Denis or Masaryk stations. Some were ill, many were too exhausted to speak. Some had their dogs, or their cats, or their rabbits or a tame bird. They came frightened and anxious, not knowing where to go or who would care for them. They only wanted to escape and to sleep.

They found suddenly that in Prague they were welcome. Not only had the town of Prague and various organisations arranged where they should sleep, and how they should be fed and looked after, but people turned out into the streets to cheer them, to stuff the children's hands with sweets and fruit, cakes and money, begging to help them. It didn't matter that one spoke German and the other Czech—they struggled to understand each other, with a few words of bad Czech on one side, or bad German on the other. The policeman on duty in front of the Masaryk station, whose job it was to guide the women and children across the street, tried his hardest to talk to them in German. In one camp, the refugees, German Social Democrats, told the party official who visited them how kind the Czech

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policeman on duty outside had been, and how well they got on with him. As none of them knew enough to thank him in Czech, and as he did not understand them when they tried in German, they asked if the party official, who spoke Czech, would do it for them, and this man went up to the policeman and told him what the refugees had said. "Oh," said the policeman, "but I must help them. I represent Herr Jaksch here." It is hard, too, to forget the sight of five men, refugees, who had just got off the train. Two of them were Czech gendarmes, still in their uniforms, dusty, worn out, unshaven, their faces as grey as their helmets; three of them were German Social Democrats, just as exhausted, grimy, their eyes glazed with fatigue. They were from some frontier village where they had fought the Henleinists side by side. They stood on the platform of the Masaryk station, holding each other's hands. They were quite silent and very dazed. They just stood there and would not separate.

### Chapter III

## THE BETRAYAL

THIS moment, when the Sudeten German problem had at last a real chance of being solved, was the very moment Great Britain and France chose to betray Czechoslovakia.

The Czechs and the non-Nazi Sudeten Germans did not yet know that they were being betrayed. Many of them suspected it. Some of them could not believe that Great Britain and France would let them down now: had not the *Daily Telegraph*<sup>1</sup> reported that in the British Inner Cabinet “there was no dissent from the view that the Prague Government, by sweeping concessions, has provided a fair and indeed handsome basis for a negotiated solution”, and had not M. Bonnet as lately as September 4th solemnly stated in the presence of the American Ambassador, that France would honour the alliance with Czechoslovakia “*en tout cas*”? Some Czechs, it is true, went further and were foolishly optimistic, especially in official circles: a Czech diplomat wrote to us early in September, “All the world is on our side”, and even told us on September 15th that “The British Mission were prejudiced against us at first, but within three weeks they were all won over—they couldn’t resist the facts”. Yet in those days the very word “Berchtesgaden” suggested “Schuschnigg” to ordinary Czech minds; and although many Czech

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Diplomatic Correspondent, September 13th, 1938.

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people thought, as apparently many English people thought, that Chamberlain had gone to Hitler not to feed him but to warn him, this journey of Chamberlain's to the farthest end of Germany shook the nerves of them all. "Oh, we shall be sold," said many of our friends; "you sent us Runciman and pushed us into an impossible position, and now you will let us down." (One of them said, "I am not afraid that it will end in a war, but that it will end in a war loan".) The ordinary Czech had grown more and more nerve-racked, as concession had followed concession to Henlein's party. They were not against concessions, but they *were* against being pushed little by little over a precipice. They had seen what concessions had done to Austria, and their common sense told them that the Fourth Plan might already have gone too far. The English Mission and the unending series of concessions it had extracted had done what months and even years of menaces and insults from the Third Reich had not begun to do—worn thin the nerves of the Czech people. They wanted desperately to make it clear that they would rather fight against murderous odds than give in to Hitler's Germany. Again and again in shops, in restaurants, in streets and in offices, we heard people say the same thing: "We had three hundred years of alien tyranny and we've had twenty years of our republic; life will not be worth living if we lose this freedom". Everybody—men, women, children too—felt that war was now certain. They were ready for that, but they were not ready for a renewal of the impotence and tormenting strain they had endured for the last six months.

Sunday, September 18th, the day when in London Chamberlain, Daladier and Bonnet were agreeing on

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the betrayal, was a glorious day in Bohemia: “The last Sunday of peace”, everyone said, and certainly the Bohemian countryside in the sunshine looked as if war and a tragic alternative belonged to another planet. We drove out to Vlašim, about forty miles from Prague. On the way we saw in every village the new poster of the Ministry of National Defence; the words on it were: “*Soldiers—we are all soldiers now*”. Vlašim is a typical Bohemian village, with an arcaded square and an unpretentious baroque castle; it also had, we were told, a munitions factory, employing three thousand people in three shifts of a thousand each. But where was the factory? We could not see it. The whole factory was underground in a wood except for a single tall chimney poking out of the trees, and to prevent an explosion from spreading it was split up into more than fifty insulated buildings. We thought of England, where the new Austin shadow factory presented to bombers seventeen and a half acres under one roof.

We had come to see Jaksch. He was very cheerful. He felt that he and his followers had done well. They had faced the fighting in their home districts, most of them without flinching and without losing their heads; and after Henlein had fled, Jaksch had taken the right steps. The National Council of Sudeten Germans was going well: it had answered to a national movement of the Sudeten German people and, though it had given away none of their interests, it had built a basis for a firm reconciliation with the Czechs. “Now at last we can solve the internal problem,” he kept on saying, “if only the Western Powers will stay firm.”

“But,” we asked Jaksch, “isn’t it now too late to prevent war? Even if Great Britain and France now stand up to Hitler, can Hitler now draw back?”

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Haven't Britain and France encouraged Hitler to commit himself too far?" To this Jaksch had an answer—perhaps the true answer. "Hitler can perfectly well draw back," he said, "and in this way: He has only to repeat June 30th, 1934. The German people doesn't want war. It is terrified of war. All the propaganda of Goebbels about French and British and Russian and Czech armaments has defeated its own ends. It was meant to make the German people angry and warlike, but it has made them afraid. They want peace. All Hitler has to do at any moment is to shoot Goebbels, Himmler and Ribbentrop, then turn to the people and say: 'I have always been a man of peace. But behind my back certain scoundrels were plotting to drag us into war. I have punished them. There will be no war.' If Hitler does that, he will be more popular than ever before. But if he goes to war, he'll be lost in a few weeks. I have many friends who have fled from the Reich, and many contacts with men who are still there, and they all bear out what I say."

We were back in Prague at about five o'clock in the afternoon. No news had come from London—a bad sign. But Dr. Hodža's broadcast speech at noon had been firm and reassuring. He said:

"Together with the other nations at whose sides we fought in the world war, we have done everything, and we will do everything, to save peace. . . .

"The so-called plebiscite can in no circumstances bring about a solution. . . . In the name of all the legal authorities of this State I declare that in spite of Henlein's refusal to negotiate with the Czechoslovak Government, and in spite of his attempted

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revolt, the Government will not change in the smallest degree its previous policy of an understanding with the Nationalities, and especially with the Sudeten Germans; in this way we shall defend the full integrity of the State and we shall continue negotiations on the basis of our last proposals.

“For this the Government does not need Henlein and the leaders who have fled; for the events that have happened here and the collapse of the revolt show clearly that to-day the Government has before it masses of Sudeten Germans of whom the great majority desires a peaceful settlement of the national problems. . . .

“We know that the test before our Republic is a severe one, and that the demands on our strength and our power of sacrifice grow every day. The centuries have taught us that nobody who cannot fight for peace can dream of it. . . . We neither have nor need strong words. We need and have strong hearts and great determination.”<sup>1</sup>

We heard, too, that the day before a delegation of the Bohemian nobility had waited on President Beneš. They, who had always resented the Republic because of its land reform and its abolition of titles, had come to assure him of their complete loyalty. Prince Kinsky read the declaration in their name:

“Loyalty to the Bohemian State, which our forefathers created and helped to hold for a thousand years, is for us so natural a duty that we considered whether we should really emphasise it.

“We see it as our duty to maintain intact the

<sup>1</sup> *Prager Presse*, September 20th.

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from the account furnished . . . by Lord Runciman. We are both convinced that, after recent events, the point has now been reached where the further maintenance within the boundaries of the Czechoslovak State of the districts mainly inhabited by Sudeten Deutsch cannot, in fact, continue any longer without imperilling the interests of Czechoslovakia herself and of European peace. In the light of these considerations, both Governments have been compelled to the conclusion that the maintenance of peace and the safety of Czechoslovakia's vital interests cannot effectively be assured unless these areas are now transferred to the Reich. . . .

The area for transfer would probably have to include areas with over 50 per cent of German inhabitants, but we should hope to arrange by negotiations provisions for adjustment of frontiers, where circumstances render it necessary, by some international body including a Czech representative. We are satisfied that the transfer of smaller areas based on a higher percentage would not meet the case.

. . . His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would be prepared, as a contribution to the pacification of Europe, to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression, one of the principal conditions of such a guarantee would be . . . the substitution of a general guarantee against unprovoked aggression in place of existing treaties which involve reciprocal obligations of a military character.

. . . The Prime Minister must resume conversations with Herr Hitler not later than Wednes-

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day, and earlier if possible. We therefore feel we must ask for your reply at the earliest possible moment.<sup>1</sup>

In the words of an American commentator, "Chamberlain and Daladier were dictating to Beneš what Hitler had dictated to Chamberlain".<sup>2</sup>

In Prague, as the news leaked out, people were incredulous, bewildered. How, they asked, can the Western Powers be so foolish, so suicidal? How can they let Czechoslovakia be broken up, so that Germany may have a free run of Central and Eastern Europe? How can they throw away all our economic resources, our armaments industry, our strategic position, our fortifications, our army, our readiness to fight to the last man, woman, girl and boy? To capture and neutralise these assets, not to "free" the Sudeten Germans, is Hitler's concern: how can anyone in France or even in England still not see this? How can England and France hand over to Nazi Germany—and in the name of self-determination—hundreds of thousands of German Catholics, Liberals, Socialists, Communists and Jews, and hundreds of thousands of Czechs, knowing Hitler's record for sadistic cruelty to every opponent? How do they think we can defend the new frontiers they impose on us? What do Great Britain and France mean by a guarantee of our new frontiers? They have already guaranteed our present ones. And does nobody realise that this is a question of life and death for us, this decision taken so callously above our heads and without consulting us?

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia, September, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *When There is No Peace* (Macmillan, New York, January, 1939).

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Apart from the foolishness, the wickedness of the Anglo-French plan stunned the Czechs. They were sincere in their belief in democracy, they were really ready to die not only for their independence but for England and France as fellow-democratic countries, and they could not understand how the professed democracies of Western Europe could believe so little in freedom and humaneness as actually to help Hitler to tear up Czechoslovakia. And where was the sanctity of treaties, for which Great Britain and France had fought in the Great War, with Czech legionaries fighting by their side? Great Britain was morally committed to Czechoslovakia as deeply as could be, both by having sent Lord Runciman and by having pressed Czechoslovakia again and again not to mobilise in face of German menaces, not to mention her obligations under the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Treaties of Locarno. But France—the treachery of France wounded the Czechs cruelly. France had used the Czechoslovak alliance time and again, against Germany and against Austria. Beneš had never let her down. Beneš had never, like Stojadinović and Beck, let himself be tempted away from France or from the League of Nations by Hitler's repeated offers. He had even made the working of the Russian alliance conditional on the alliance with France. So this was his reward. And France was even more than an ally of nearly fifteen years' standing—she was a friend; it was towards French culture and civilisation that Czechoslovakia had turned after the Great War. "*Le pire de tout,*" said a Czechoslovak statesman that day, "*c'est de voir que Stojadinović avait raison, quand il disait, 'Méfiez-vous des puissances occidentales—ce sont des traitres'.*"

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Throughout September 19th and 20th President Beneš and the Czechoslovak Cabinet discussed the proposals. They still hoped that the French Cabinet might revolt. They could not believe that M. Paul Reynaud or M. Georges Mandel, their friends, would not resign. But no news of resignations came from Paris.

Late in the afternoon of Tuesday, September 20th, after sitting all day, the Czechoslovak Government sent its answer to London and Paris. It was a refusal. It could not well have been anything else. The Czech people were solid against surrender, although they knew perfectly well the consequences that might follow from a refusal. In the agonising dilemma into which they had been thrust, they went about their daily work with calm and dignity. No run on the banks, no queues in the food shops, only a heightened demand for gas masks and newspapers. There was not even any chauvinism, only a quiet determination to meet whatever fate lay in store for them. "This is our republic", they said simply; "we shall defend it."

The Czechoslovak Note of September 20th was a long, reasoned, conciliatory but firm reply to the British and French Governments.<sup>1</sup> It began by thanking them, but saying that their proposals were "not adapted to attaining the aim pursued by them in the great effort they are making for peace". Then it protested against action having been taken against Czechoslovakia "without her being heard", and this although the Czechoslovak Government<sup>2</sup> had given notice that it could not take responsibility for decisions

<sup>1</sup> We have seen it and we give a full translation at the end of this book, in Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> On Sunday, September 18th.

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made without it. Czechoslovakia was a democracy, and a decision about its frontiers could not be made without consulting Parliament. To accept these proposals would be to mutilate the State "in every direction", economically and strategically. Sooner or later, if this were done, Czechoslovakia "would fall under the total influence of Germany". Even if "Czechoslovakia should decide for the proposed sacrifices, the question of peace would be in no degree resolved". Many Sudeten Germans, preferring the democratic atmosphere of Czechoslovakia to the Reich, would emigrate, and this would create new difficulties. The laming of Czechoslovakia would seriously disturb the balance of forces in Europe, with far-reaching consequences, especially for France. The Czechoslovak Government appreciated highly the offer of a guarantee, which "could certainly open the way to an *entente* between all the interested parties, if the present nationalities' dispute were to be arranged amicably and in such a way as not to impose upon Czechoslovakia unacceptable sacrifices". Czechoslovakia had given many proofs of devotion to peace. "On the insistence of her friends" she had gone very far in concessions to the Sudeten Germans; besides, the British Government had emphasised that these should not go outside the limits of the Czechoslovak constitution. In spite of a rebellion "fomented from without", the Czechoslovak Government maintained its proposals and it "still considers this procedure capable of realisation". And Czechoslovakia had been faithful to all her engagements—to her friends, to the League of Nations and its members, and to other nations too. The arbitration treaty of October 16th, 1925, had been recognised as still valid by the present German Government, and the

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Czechoslovak Government now requested that this treaty be applied, promising to accept the arbitral sentence.

Why was this—the Czechoslovak answer—left out of the British Government's White Paper?

## *Chapter IV*

# ULTIMATUM AND RISING

BEFORE two o'clock on Wednesday morning the British and French Ministers in Prague telephoned to the Hradčany to ask for an audience with President Beneš. The President had gone to bed only a short time before, not having slept at all for two days and two nights. He got up and received them at 2 A.M. What had they come to say? Had the well-based reasoning of the Czechoslovak reply persuaded France and Great Britain to support Czechoslovakia in her appeal to arbitration? On the contrary: M. de Lacroix and Mr. Newton had come with an ultimatum. Germany had found it a paying method to force grave decisions upon the world during week-ends; now the two great democracies of Western Europe had invented a refinement of this technique—they fell upon an exhausted Government in the small hours of the morning.

Already at 5 P.M. the day before, when Dr. Krofta had handed to the British and French Ministers the Czechoslovak Note refusing the Anglo-French plan and proposing arbitration, Mr. Newton had threatened that Great Britain would declare herself disinterested if Czechoslovakia maintained this refusal; and M. de Lacroix had made no protest against this threat. Now, at two in the morning of September 21st Mr. Newton

## ULTIMATUM AND RISING

handed to President Beneš a Note about which he had had from London these instructions:<sup>1</sup>

You should at once join with your French colleague in pointing out to the Czechoslovak Government that their reply in no way meets the critical situation which the Anglo-French proposals were designed to avert and if adhered to would, when made public, in our opinion, lead to an immediate German invasion. You should urge the Czech Government to withdraw this reply and urgently consider an alternative that takes account of realities. The Anglo-French proposals remain, in our view, the only chance of avoiding an immediate German attack. On the basis of the reply now under consideration I would have no hope of any useful result ensuing for a second visit to Herr Hitler and the Prime Minister would be obliged to cancel the arrangements for it. We therefore beg the Czech Government to consider urgently and seriously before producing a situation for which we could take no responsibility. We should of course have been willing to put the Czech proposal for arbitration before the German Government if we had thought that at this stage there was any chance of its receiving favourable consideration, but we cannot for a moment believe that it would be acceptable now. Nor do we think that the German Government would regard the present proposition as one that is capable of being settled by arbitration as the Czech Government suggest. If on reconsideration the Czech Government feel bound to reject our advice they must of course

<sup>1</sup> As stated by Mr. Butler, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in the House of Commons on October 5th, 1938. Hansard, col. 450.

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be free to take any action they think appropriate to meet the situation that may thereafter develop.

The French Minister, M. de Lacroix, added a verbal statement, in which he said that if war broke out because of the Czechoslovak refusal, "*la France ne s'y associera pas*". President Beneš wrote this down in front of the two Ministers, and later asked that the French Government should itself let him have its *démarche* in writing. Some time on September 21st he received a Note whose wording was milder than the words used by M. de Lacroix, but whose contents were the same.<sup>1</sup>

"The Czechoslovak Government", said Mr. Chamberlain later, "was urged to accept the Anglo-French proposals immediately."<sup>2</sup> This "urging" was done by the French and British Ministers in two interviews, the one with Dr. Krofta at 5 p.m. on September 20th, the other with President Beneš on September 21st at two in the morning. At these two interviews much of what the two Ministers said was spoken after verbal instructions, not read out from a detailed telegram. There exists a ciphered telegram in which the Foreign Office in Prague informed some of its representatives abroad of the main contents of both interviews, telescoping the two together. On the basis of this telegram Professor Seton-Watson published the following summary of what the two Ministers said in the two interviews:

(1) Britain and France have the duty to prevent an European war if humanly possible, and thus an invasion of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>1</sup> See the article by Vindex in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, February, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, September 28th, 1938; Hansard, col. 17.



President Beneš

*Centropress, Prague*



## ULTIMATUM AND RISING

(2) They wish the Czech Government to realise that if it does not *unconditionally and at once* accept the Anglo-French Plan, it will stand before the world as solely responsible for the ensuing war.

(3) By refusing, Czechoslovakia will also be guilty of destroying Anglo-French solidarity, since, *in that event*, Britain *will under no circumstances march, even if France went to the aid of Czechoslovakia*.

(4) If the refusal should provoke a war, France gives official notice that she will not fulfil her treaty obligations.<sup>1</sup>

If the first point is an expression of a sentiment with which nobody would quarrel, the second is an outrageous ultimatum. France and Great Britain were pressing the Czechoslovak Government to accept a plan for its country's dismemberment "at once", that is, without consulting Parliament or public opinion in any way; and they were actually threatening to exonerate the German Government publicly from all blame.

Even this is not all. "From the attitude of the two Ministers . . . there was no doubt that Berlin was aware that her way was unopposed, to proceed against Czechoslovakia without fear of interference from the Western Powers. It was also obvious that both Warsaw and Budapest were acquainted with this." Such is the testimony of Hubert Ripka, then diplomatic editor of *Lidové Noviny* and in close touch with President Beneš.<sup>2</sup>

France and Great Britain thus used the cruellest pressure they had in their power in order to make Czechoslovakia accept a dismemberment that must

<sup>1</sup> See *Munich and the Dictators* (Cambridge University Press, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> See *Four Days* (Heinemann, 1938).

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mean the loss of her independence. And yet, when President Beneš, full of bewilderment and anguish, replied that "he was being given a cruel ultimatum", he was told that "it was rather a matter of 'pressing friendly advice'".<sup>1</sup>

As soon as Mr. Newton and M. de Lacroix had left him, the President called his weary Cabinet from their beds. Soon after three o'clock they began to arrive at the Castle. The discussions were still going on at eight in the morning, interrupted by frantic telephone calls from the British and French Ministers reminding them that they were keeping Mr. Chamberlain waiting. At 4 A.M. Mr. G. E. R. Gedye wired to the *New York Times* that the Czechoslovak Cabinet would resist, and that if Hitler wanted to talk to Beneš as he had talked to Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden he would have to fight his way to Prague. Nobody believed that the Czechs would surrender.

At eight o'clock in the morning we left the suburb of Prague where we were staying and went into the town to buy gas-masks and warm clothes for the war. We knew that something had happened at 2 A.M., but we had no details. We knew, too, that the Cabinet was still sitting, but we were convinced that the Czech refusal was definitive and inevitable. At nine, just as we were beginning breakfast in the sun outside the Hotel Esplanade, the telephone rang. It was the Czechoslovak Foreign Office. "*La situation est complètement changée! Nous sommes obligés de capituler. C'est à cause de la Pologne.*" More he would not say. He only repeated again and again that it was "because of Poland".

We were bowled over. For days, indeed for weeks,

<sup>1</sup> See *Four Days* (Heinemann, 1938).

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we had thought and said and written that the Czechs would fight to the last man, woman and child for their independence, even if they were left entirely alone and surrounded. That may seem an odd belief now, to people who were not there. But everyone who knew the mood of the Czech people after the invasion of Austria and May 21st, after the torment of "going to the limit of concessions", still more everyone who had studied their superb army, thought the same thing.

By eleven o'clock there was still no decision. A majority in the Cabinet and among the leaders of the Coalition parties<sup>1</sup> was for capitulation, but a large and powerful minority was against: there were some threats of resignation. We found out that a communication had come in the small hours of the morning with a Russian request that Czechoslovakia should appeal to the League of Nations under Article XI or Article XVI of the Covenant: Russia would then fulfil her League obligations to Czechoslovakia even if the French Government should dishonour its pledges. Many people, in the Cabinet and in the Foreign Office, believed that this was merely a polite way of leaving Czechoslovakia in the lurch; others thought that Russia's purpose was to be able to stand by Czechoslovakia without giving any excuse to Germany or her friends in Britain and France for an anti-Bolshevik crusade.<sup>2</sup> They were right. Because it was essential both to Czechoslovakia and to Russia to give Germany, Great Britain

<sup>1</sup> That is, the parties supporting the Government.

<sup>2</sup> The Prague correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* reported later in the day that "some of the Cabinet wished to put a direct question to Russia: 'If we are the victims of unprovoked aggression would you support us in all circumstances?' The putting of this question was opposed by the supporters of capitulation on the plea that it would only precipitate a German invasion" (*Daily Telegraph*, September 22nd, 1938).

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and France no chance of making Czechoslovakia a second Spain, Russia's policy was to help Czechoslovakia not only by arms but by discretion. But that Russia was really willing to help the Czechs militarily to resist a German attack, even if France did not, is clear, for at about 5 P.M. on September 21st a telegram reached Prague from the Czechoslovak Minister in Moscow, asking the Czechoslovak Government to send an aeroplane to Kiev at once for the Russian liaison officers.

But by three o'clock in the afternoon these members of the Cabinet who had stood firm were worn down by their colleagues and by the continued cruel pressure from the British and French Ministers. A Note was prepared accepting the Franco-British proposals as a basis of negotiation, subject to the consent of the Czechoslovak Parliament. This was not enough. At four o'clock new threats, new pressure from the British and French Governments. They could not wait for Parliaments. Czechoslovakia must accept all, immediately.

At five o'clock Dr. Krofta, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, handed to Mr. Newton and M. de Lacroix the text of Czechoslovakia's submission. He could not make the usual polite speech to them, he handed them the Note with a few bare words. He looked, we are told, as though he would commit suicide. For this honest, gracious, cultured man, the greatest modern Czech historian, the student of Bohemian-German culture, an unshaken believer in the League of Nations and in democratic ideals, the devoted follower of Beneš, for him, too, this was a shameful betrayal.

This Note also was omitted from the British White Paper. It is worth a careful reading:



*Centropress, Prague*

Dr. Kamil Krofta,  
Former Foreign Secretary of Czechoslovakia



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Forcé par les circonstances et les insistances excessivement pressantes et à la suite de la communication des Gouvernements français et britannique du 21 Septembre de l'année courante dans laquelle les deux Gouvernements ont exprimé leur manière de voir au sujet de l'assistance à la Tchécoslovaquie si elle refusait d'accepter les propositions franco-britanniques et serait à la suite de cela, attaquée par l'Allemagne, le Gouvernement de la République tchécoslovaque accepte dans ces conditions avec des sentiments de douleur les propositions françaises et britanniques en supposant que les deux gouvernements feront tout pour les faire appliquer avec toute sauvegarde des intérêts vitaux de l'Etat tchécoslovaque. Il constate avec regret que les propositions ont été élaborées sans la consultation préalable du Gouvernement tchécoslovaque.

Regrettant profondément que sa proposition d'arbitrage n'ait pas été acceptée, il les accepte comme un tout en soulignant le principe de la garantie comme elle est formulée dans la Note et les accepte en supposant que les deux gouvernements ne tolèreront pas l'invasion allemande sur le territoire tchécoslovaque qui restera tchécoslovaque jusqu'au moment où le transfert du territoire après la fixation de la frontière nouvelle par la commission internationale dont on parle dans les propositions pourrait être effectué.

Il est d'avis que la proposition franco-britannique suppose que tous les détails de la réalisation pratique des propositions franco-britannique seront fixés d'accord avec le Gouvernement tchécoslovaque.

The crowds were already gathering in the streets. By half-past six the Václavské Náměstí, the long, wide main street of Prague, was grey with thousands.

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Policemen swarmed. They did not threaten; they walked with the crowd and discussed with them. They, too, could not understand this capitulation. Many stood quite still, silent, mournful, grim, men as well as women weeping; some stumped angrily up and down; some gathered in little knots around a speaker or a policeman trying to reason it out.

In Prague at this time there were loud-speakers along all the main streets, and at eight o'clock they gave out a message from the Propaganda Minister, Vavrečka, read by the actor Štěpánek:

“Dear fellow-citizens! In the course of history our nation has suffered catastrophes and horrors without number. . . . It has often seemed that our people was exterminated and destroyed . . . and yet our nation has always risen up again. . . .

“To-day such a catastrophe threatens our State and our nation anew. You have heard the official news of the Great Powers’ *démarche* to our Government. You have heard how, in a way for which there is no example in history, our allies and friends dictated to us sacrifices such as are laid upon the vanquished and defeated.

“But we are not defeated and if our Government, completely united, with the President of the Republic at its head, had to decide to accept such terrible demands, they did it because they wished to save the whole nation from vain bloodshed.

“It is not lack of courage that has brought our leaders to this decision, to a decision that lies heavy on all our hearts. Even the bravest can find himself in a situation where he must draw back before the avalanche that rolls upon him. God

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knows that often greater courage is needed for life than for suicide. God knows that there can be no man of honour in the world who can declare that we were afraid and cowardly when to-day we empowered our Foreign Minister to inform France and Great Britain: We have decided to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of peace in the world, as centuries ago the great Saint sacrificed himself on the cross for the sake of mankind.

“Dear brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, children! To-day we will make no reproaches towards those who left us alone. History will have its say about these days. Our duty is to look to the future, to watch and protect the nation, which must and will live. Now we shall be among ourselves, we will be strong—and it rests with you whether we rise again. We are not going down, and we will keep our country. We face the future with our heads high. *Nazdar!*”

There was no revolution in Czechoslovakia. The thing that happened in the next twenty-four hours had nothing whatever to do with economic or social discontent. Between the police and the people there was no enmity, nothing but peaceful arguments about the political situation. What happened was an irresistible outburst of a people’s indignation, a people that remained all the time disciplined and humane—a people, never a mob. After months of nerve-racking strain, ending in a terrible day of foreboding and rumours, the will of the Czech people suddenly proclaimed itself—for what reason? Because the news was out that their Government had accepted the peremptory demands of the German, French and British

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Governments for a partition of the Republic, the end of its independence.

But there was something more than that, something that made this manifestation truly heroic. Everyone who took part—and all classes, men, women and children took part—had read the Government's *communiqué* or had heard the broadcast in which the Government's decision was explained, or at least knew what was in it. They understood, all of them, that the Czechoslovak Government had accepted this ultimatum because it believed that Czechoslovakia was alone, surrounded by enemies, so that resistance would almost certainly mean extermination. And yet every one of them turned out into the streets in order to show somehow, as best they could, one thing—that they would rather fight and die for their Republic, even if the cause were hopeless.

That was the sole aim of the rising of the Czechoslovak people. It was the unmistakable indication of an open-eyed choice, not an outbreak of violence. In the Deutsches Haus, the former headquarters of the Henlein party, one pane of glass was broken. A great crowd burst into *Radiojournal*, the Prague broadcasting station, breaking a little glass in the process. But once inside, did it loot and smash as a revolutionary mob would have done? No. All it asked was to be allowed to speak through the microphone to the peoples of the world, to explain to them that it would rather die than yield.

This we saw. We were in the broadcasting station that evening. At a quarter to nine, as we came downstairs from the studio into the main hall, we found all the doors shut, with a huge crowd outside crying to be let in. The doors were glass doors, and there

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was one policeman on duty. Hysterical high officials ran hither and thither, shouting at the tops of their voices, telephoning for more police—who could not be spared—and lugging around fire hoses—which they wanted to turn on the crowd. That indeed would have been lunacy. Luckily Otakar Jeremiáš, the musician, and an official from the Foreign Office, calmed down the bureaucrats, to whom their own people was a new and frightening fact.

When the crowd broke in, they streamed up the main staircase; looking for microphones. They were so singleminded that when they found we were English they did not attack us or spit at us (we should not have blamed them if they had), they were interested merely for a moment, then went on looking for their microphones. Later one of them did manage to speak a few sentences into the microphone, claiming the people's right to defend itself, demanding a military dictatorship, and accusing the Agrarians, but he was soon cut off.

Later still a few soldiers arrived. The sight of them seemed to make the people less unhappy. One of them happened to be a young officer whom we knew, attached to the General Staff. He wanted to take us home, because he thought it was not safe to be French or English in Prague that night, and there was a long and rather comic discussion as to whether we should pass as Swiss or Belgian—we must not belong to any Great Power. "With me", he said, and it was clearly true, "the only danger is that the people may want to carry me about on their shoulders." He told us that at Geneva M. Litvinov had been threatened that if Czechoslovakia and Russia fought together against Germany, Great Britain would intervene on Germany's

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side. This seemed to us nonsense: even if such a threat had been made, how could anyone take it seriously? You can make peace against the will of the people, but not war, for war demands of the people sustained collaboration, not simply acquiescence. All this we said in answer to the Czech officer. But later we came to believe that a menace of this sort had been made and taken seriously.

Out in the streets again, we found the lower part of the town quieter; people still stood in little groups on the pavement and talked to each other, or to the police; Václavské Náměskí was still thinly covered; but the crowds had by now swept up to the Castle and to the building of the General Staff. "Long live the Army!" they cried. "Long live General Syrový!" "Long live General Krejčí!" "Give us a military dictatorship!" "Give us arms and we will defend ourselves; don't be afraid!" "Give us arms, we have paid for them!" "Long live the U.S.S.R.!" "*We* will defend *our* Republic!" One after another members of the Cabinet, the Mayor of Prague, Dr. Zenkl and the beloved General Syrový begged them to be calm, to be quiet and disciplined. At last, long after midnight, they began to go towards their homes, but the streets did not clear all through the night.

Next morning, September 22nd, from the very early hours the demonstrations continued. Great masses of people marched in orderly columns into the centre of the town from the outer suburbs and even from the countryside. All of them carried the Czechoslovak flag, a few of them the red flag too. Many of them were workers who had given up a day's pay to take part, and working women climbed on to the steps of the statue of St. Wenceslas—Bohemia's

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national saint—and unfurled a banner, “We women want to protect our families from fascism”. By nine o’clock the big square before the Parliament was black with people standing in a thick mass, nearly a quarter of a million of them. They cried their slogans, they shouted for the army, and “Down with the Government of the capitulation”. Many were still weeping. Then, a little after ten, they heard the news through the loud-speakers that the Hodža Government had resigned and that a Government of National Defence would succeed it, with a soldier at its head. It seemed as if the cheers would go on for ever. Then members of all parties and all groups came on to the balcony to speak to the crowd—Catholic, Agrarian, Fascist, Slovak, Conservative, Communist. The leader of the Conservative National Union, Dr. Ladislav Rašín, whose father Alois Rašín, the Republic’s first finance minister, had been murdered by a Communist in 1923, turned to the people, saying: “In this hour there is for me no difference between my party and the Communists; we all love Czechoslovakia, we are all willing to die for its independence. I, the younger Rašín, stretch out my hand to the Communists.” Ex-General Gajda, the Czech Fascist, appeared: there was the beginnings of a demonstration against him; but when he explained that he was there as a soldier and a legionary, not as a party man, the noise died away. An Agrarian deputy tried to speak, but he could not make himself heard at first above the howls and cat-calls. “Traitors!” they shouted. “Who helped Henlein?” “Who murdered the police?” “Who gave in to Hitler?” “Down with the capitulation.” Then a Socialist came forward and begged the crowd to listen, first because the Agrarian deputy was a

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Slovak,<sup>1</sup> but also because at this time "bourgeois, workers and peasants must stand together". The people listened quietly. Last of all, General Obrátilék came forward in uniform, with a declaration from General Syrový: "The army stands, and will stand, on the frontier, and it will defend our liberties to the very end. Here in Prague, keep calm, keep good nerves—that is all we ask of you. The time may soon come when I shall call upon you to take a more active part in the defence in which we all long to join."

The people sang "Kde Domov Můj" and the old "Hej Slované"; they swore the oath of allegiance to the Republic. And then this great crowd began to go quietly back to homes and factories. Within a couple of hours most of the workers in the factories around Prague were back at work again, many were digging trenches for protection against bombs. All of them believed that they had got what they wanted; a Government that would defend the Republic, defend its independence, whatever the consequences.<sup>2</sup> These were the demonstrations that the German wireless described as "horrible anti-German outbreaks", with "blood flowing in the very centre of Prague".

At half-past one in the afternoon General Syrový spoke to the people by wireless. The General said:

"Citizens! In this fateful hour for the State and the Nation, I ask you to hold to your places: the soldier by his weapon, the peasant by his plough, the workmen in their factories and workshops, the clerks in their offices. The army is watching over the

<sup>1</sup> The Slovak Agrarians were thought to be more Liberal and less corrupt than the Czech wing.

<sup>2</sup> They realised quite clearly that it was not a question of ceding a little patch of ground to Germany, but of Czechoslovakia's whole independence.

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security of the Republic, and it can carry out its work only if the nation stands behind it, calm and united. Demonstrate your determination by your work for the State. Each one of you, go back to your duties, for only so can the defence of the State be ready. All demonstrations now are work for the enemy.”

Why did the Czech people believe in General Syrový? Why had this stout, mild, bull-necked, one-eyed *Dorfonkel* this hold over them? Firstly, of course, because he was Inspector-General of their beloved army, but secondly because he personified their struggle for liberty during the World War.

Jan Syrový, a young student in Warsaw when the War broke out, entered the Russian Army as a volunteer, and joined the Czechoslovak Legions. At twenty-nine he was a Colonel and the commander of the Czech Infantry regiment “George of Poděbrad”. In 1918 he became Commander-in-Chief of all the Czechoslovak troops in Siberia—about 90,000 men—and on October 2nd the Allies made him Commander-in-Chief of the allied armies in Siberia—Czechs, Slovaks, Bohemian Germans, Poles, Roumanians and Jugoslavs. He led the Czechoslovak Legions on that famous *Anabasis*, when this handful of troops gained control of the whole Trans-Siberian railway, and fought its way against German and Bolshevik troops right across Siberia to Vladivostok. (His men organised a Chamber of Commerce, a savings bank, a bank, Workers’ Associations and a military postal service, in the wilds of Siberia). Mr. Lloyd George wrote to the Czechoslovak National Council in September, 1918:

On behalf of the British War Cabinet I send you

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our heartiest congratulations on the striking successes won by the Czechoslovak forces against armies of German and Austrian troops in Siberia. The story of the adventures and triumphs of this small army is, indeed, one of the greatest epics of history. It has filled us all with admiration for the courage, persistence and self-control of your countrymen and shows what can be done to triumph over time, distance and lack of material sources by those holding the spirit of freedom in their hearts. Your nation has rendered inestimable service to Russia and to the allies in their struggle to free the world from despotism; we shall never forget it.<sup>1</sup>

Is it surprising that the Czech people could not believe that General Syrový, one of the creators of the Republic, would not defend the Republic now?

Early in the evening General Syrový formed his Government; only Dr. Krofta, the Foreign Minister, and Dr. Kalfus, the Finance Minister, remained from Dr. Hodža's Cabinet. Otherwise the new Cabinet was made up of civil servants and of trusted people like Dr. Zenkl, the Mayor of Prague, and Dr. Bukovsky, the leader of the Sokol movement. "It is clear that the Czech people", the *Berliner Tageblatt* commented, "will no longer be ruled and led by Czechs, but by the deputies of Stalin." And this at the time when the Czech Prime Minister was a general who had fought against the Bolsheviks, and when there was not a single Communist in the Czechoslovak Government.

At five minutes past seven on that moving day Dr. Beneš spoke over the wireless to the nation. Fanfares

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by President Masaryk, *The Making of a State* (American edition), pp. 276-7.

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from Smetana's *Libuše* preceded his speech.<sup>1</sup> The President, calm and courageous as ever, said:

“Great changes are taking place throughout Europe. It is not only a question for us. . . . In other places they will come in different forms, and we shall live through many anxious moments before we in these parts of the world will have lasting peace and quiet. It is therefore important for us, in all circumstances, to remain calm, steadfast and united. . . .

“I have said already that I have never been afraid in my life, and I do not fear to-day for our State. I have my plan for all eventualities, and I do not allow myself to be disturbed by anything. We desire an agreement, an agreement towards which we are working to-day, an agreement between the greatest nations of the world; if this happens, and this agreement is an honourable one, for our people there will be advantage in it; and it will contain within it a general reconciliation between England, France and Germany, *our* reconciliation with Germany and our neighbours, and our co-operation with other States, especially those in Eastern Europe. . . .

“Our people have always understood that it is sometimes necessary to negotiate and sometimes to fight. If we must fight, then we will fight to the last breath. If it is necessary and possible to negotiate, then we must negotiate. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Libuše*, besides being perhaps Smetana's greatest opera, is the very heart of Czech patriotism. *Libuše*, the legend runs, was a Bohemian princess of the tenth century, who married a peasant, Přemysl, and with him founded the Přemyslid dynasty, which ruled Bohemia for nearly four centuries. The opera ends with *Libuše*'s prophecy, in which, after foretelling the glories of Czech history, she says: “There are dark clouds, I can see no more, but one thing I know, my dear Czech people will not perish”.

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“I repeat, I see things clearly and I have my plan. . . . Let us spare our strength, for we shall need it; I repeat, spare our strength, for we shall need it. . . . You do not need to fear, there have been worse times, and there have soon been better times afterwards. The new government has now been formed. It was formed with the co-operation of all parties. The political parties will stand firmly and loyally behind it, national solidarity will manifest itself in it. And lastly, in this moment let me give you a warning: each of you stick to your post like a soldier. So you can best serve the State. And secondly: from somewhere in Europe alarming and incredible news is spread about; be careful of it, and calm those who believe it. Be careful, too, of *provocateurs*.

“. . . Do not fear for the Nation and the State. They have deep and firm roots. As Smetana’s Libuše prophesied, ‘My dear Czech people will never perish’. No, it will not perish, it will outlive all fears and horrors gloriously.”

The people were satisfied. After the speech of the President and the statements of General Syrový they believed they had got what they wanted, and that the capitulation was repudiated.

## *Chapter V*

### TO ARMS!

“FELLOW citizens! The most decisive, the most earnest, moment has come. Success depends on every one of you. Do not falter in your duty; be calm, determined, faithful and reliable. . . . Our battle is a righteous one. All in a single front for the freedom of our fatherland! Long live free Czechoslovakia!” The Prague announcer’s voice stopped. Another voice began to read the President’s proclamation, this time in Slovak, then in German, in Magyar, in Ruthene, in Polish—all the languages of the Republic. Then it began again in Czech. It was the proclamation of a general mobilisation for Czechoslovakia, broadcast at twenty minutes past ten on Friday night, September 23rd.

During the day news had slowly trickled through from Godesberg. Nothing was officially made known, but many people knew that Hitler had made new demands which seemed to have startled Mr. Chamberlain into resistance. We ourselves watched the effect these scraps of news from Godesberg had on Herr Kundt and Dr. Neuwirth, leaders of the late S.d.P. They had for some reason known only to themselves—for it is an entirely Czech hotel—made their headquarters at the Hotel Esplanade in Prague. They were nervous and worried. They sat in a corner and huddled over their papers, rushing every now and then

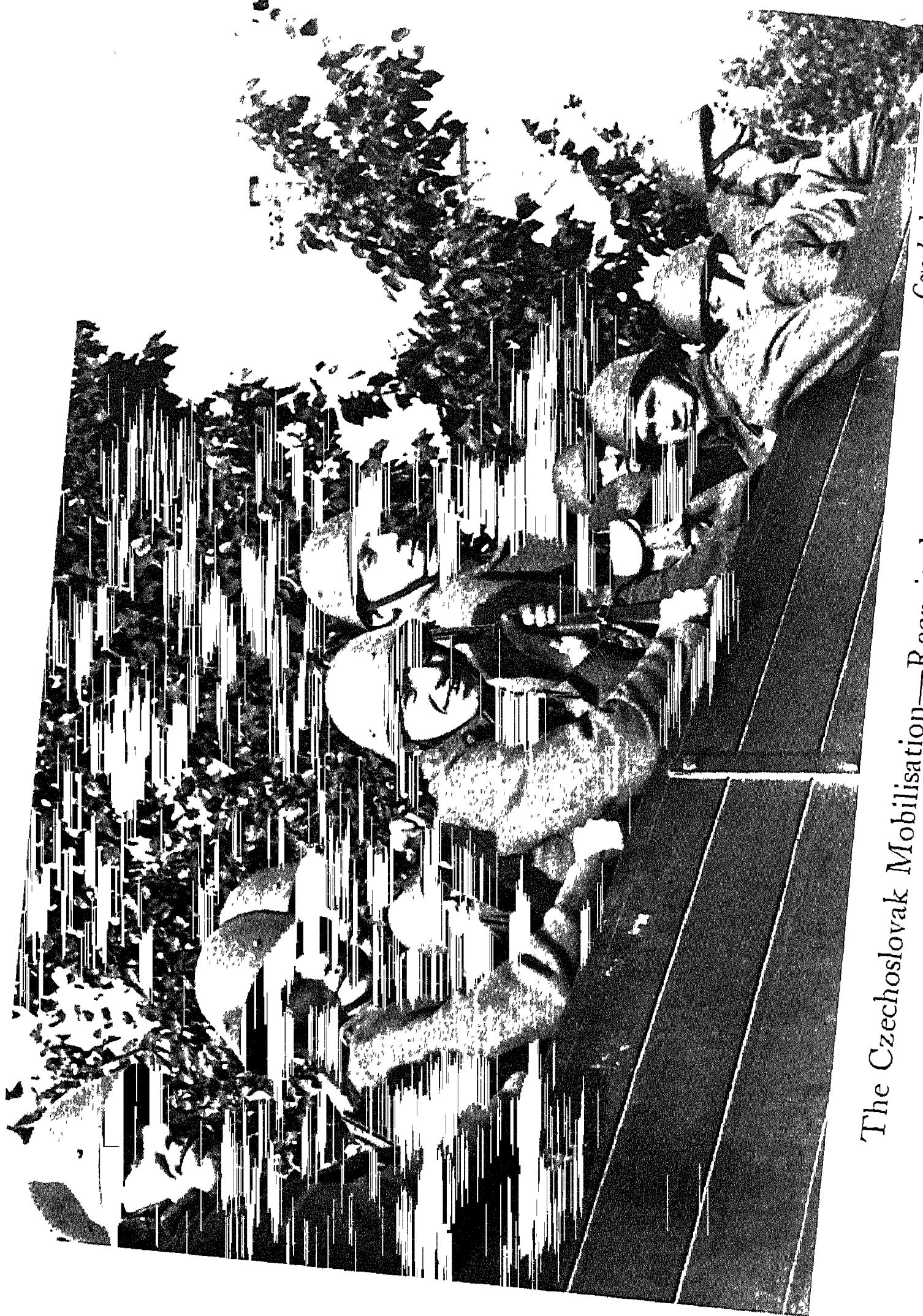
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to a telephone-box. Kundt drank several brandies. We came out into the hall at one moment and heard a loud, harsh, hysterical voice yelling in German. For an instant we thought it was the Reichsgerman wireless. But we listened in vain for applause. It was Dr. Neuwirth telephoning to the German Legation for instructions. There were incidents in Eger. Should they stay in Prague or should they fly to Berlin? Had the Legation an aeroplane?

There was good news in the afternoon. At four o'clock that morning M. Potemkin, the Assistant Commissar for Foreign Affairs, had warned the Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow that, if Polish troops violated the Czechoslovak frontier, the Russo-Polish non-aggression pact of 1932 would no longer be valid. Roumania replied late in the afternoon with an unconditional "Yes" to the Czechoslovak Government's question whether she would fulfil her obligations under the Little Entente treaties; and even M. Stojadinović promised to consult his Chief of Staff. News came from Geneva that M. Litvinov had declared that, *even after Czechoslovakia's submission to the Franco-British ultimatum*<sup>1</sup> the Soviet Government would carry out its engagements if negotiations failed and Czechoslovakia were attacked.

And General Faucher, the head of the French Military Mission in Czechoslovakia, had (it now became known) resigned from the French Army and placed himself at the disposal of the Czechoslovak Government. The joy which this news gave to the Czechs is indescribable, for it made them feel that even in France they had not been wholly deceived.

<sup>1</sup> Czechoslovakia's acceptance of the Berchtesgaden proposals was tantamount to a denunciation of her alliance with the U.S.S.R.



The Czechoslovak Mobilisation—Recruits leaving for the Frontiers  
*Czechoslovak General Staff*



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The Czech people did not realise at all that the capitulation of September 21st had not been repudiated by the new Government. Now came events which made this question seem past and immaterial. The conversations at Godesberg had broken down, and at five o'clock the British Minister in Prague delivered an amazing message. This is the report of it, made by Dr. Krno of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office:

The British Minister (Newton) handed to me at 17 o'clock on the 23rd the following communication which arrived from London by telephone (according to Troutbeck) at 16.30 o'clock: "We are agreed with the French Government upon informing the Czechoslovak Government that the British and French Governments can no longer take the responsibility of advising Czechoslovakia not to mobilise".

The English Minister read to me this short additional document from his *dossier*: "it is necessary to emphasise that such a measure might very easily result in action by others; therefore, it might be advisable for the Czechoslovak Government to avoid all superfluous publicity".

Mr. Newton also said that he still did not exclude the possibility of an agreement in Godesberg, but that in spite of that the situation was extremely serious.

And here is Dr. Krno's report of his interview with the French Minister, M. de Lacroix, at 6.15 P.M. on the same day:

"The French Government (said M. de Lacroix) can no longer take the responsibility of continuing

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to give the advice which it had given to Czechoslovakia for the duration of the Franco-British negotiations. From this moment the Czechoslovak Government is free to take the measures which seem to it necessary if the situation should deteriorate afresh."

The Minister added that M. Léger had made the following remarks: (1) That from the military point of view the French Government had no disturbing information, and (2) that it advises the Czechoslovak Government to take the necessary measures with the greatest possible discretion.

That evening we were in the Hotel Esplanade, dining with a French journalist and a Czechoslovak diplomat. At the next table sat Kundt, Neuwirth and two Reichsgerman "journalists" who had arrived that morning. All four of them looked harassed and gloomy; Kundt and Neuwirth mumbled together, the Reichsgermans munched silently. About a quarter past nine we were called into the hall. There we found two friends. They told us that a general mobilisation would be announced in an hour's time. We ran back into the restaurant. Kundt and Neuwirth, seeing the expected news in our faces, looked gloomier than ever.

While we were talking in the hall, the reception clerk—a Sudeten German from Bodenbach—came up to us and asked, "Is it true that there is a general mobilisation?" We said, Yes, it was quite true. "Oh," said the clerk, "I must go at once. Good-bye." A few minutes later we saw him, a brown-paper parcel under his arm, hurrying off towards the Wilson Station across the road. Waiters scattered in

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all directions. At one moment one saw an ordinary hotel restaurant with waiters serving dinner or coffee; the next minute, with scarcely a word, they had left the room, and a few minutes later one saw them slipping out of the building with their parcels or their little cases. Some of them even ran out into the street as they were, tail coats, white ties and all. Herr Kundt, who had ordered coffee, saw his waiter appear at the other end of the room with the tray, then suddenly stop dead, bang the tray down on the first table he saw, and scurry out of the room. When he asked what had happened, he was told "There is a general mobilisation. Your waiter has gone to join his regiment." The clammy faces of the Sudeten German ex-leaders grew clammier still a few minutes later, when two policemen walked into the hotel and arrested a German air force officer who was sitting in the hall. Soon afterwards they came back again and took away the two German journalists and a Czech woman spy. Kundt and Neuwirth were left alone with their jitters.

In the streets there was no fuss. Everything was businesslike, quick. There were none of the noisy jubilations and partings, parades and marches-past and send-offs, that were still the fashion in 1914. There was perfect discipline—not the discipline of people who need to march in fours under the eyes of a martinet, but the discipline of people who are disciplined even when they are left to themselves and are doing things in their own way. A very few minutes after the news came through, all Prague was full of men hurrying towards the railway stations, each carrying a little package or a small suitcase. Here and there one heard cheering, or saw a leave-taking, but it never lasted for more than a minute or two; every man was

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competing to get to his place in the shortest time by the best route. Police and A.R.P. volunteers were stopping cars, asking them to take soldiers on their way, or were stationed at the stopping-places of trams to see that soldiers had first call on all the places available. In a few minutes, too, the whole of Prague was black. The street lights were darkened or extinguished altogether, the lights on cars and trams were shaded to a thin blue trickle, all lights in windows were put out, or black curtains were drawn over them.

We drove slowly up through the town to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Černín Palace, near the Castle. Inside all was darkness. We talked with the porter, a legionary. He walked outside the door with us. "England goes with us," he said. "France goes too, Russia too, Roumania too." He suddenly clenched his fists and raised them towards the sky. "Ouf," he said.

"Ouf! at last!" That seemed to be the general feeling. Not that the Czechs wanted a war: far from it. They were realists; no dictatorship had soaked their minds with propaganda pretending that war is noble and that might is right, they understood well that war is not a joke, they had no taste for violence, destruction. Nor were they chauvinists, and in spite of all the efforts made by German propaganda to create an impassable opposition between Germans and Czechs, the Czechs did not hate Germans—the warmth of their welcome to the German democrats who were refugees from the Sudetenland proved that.

But the Czechs, while the philosophy of Masaryk had touched them very closely, so that they respected reason and human individuality, were no Tolstoyan pacifists. They were prepared to resist evil. Those

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who were responsible for training the Czechoslovak Army did not think it necessary to saturate the soldiers with the lie that war itself is noble: on the contrary, as a high officer in the General Staff told us, the soldiers were taught that war is terrible, beastly, wasteful and a disgrace to humanity, but one kind of war is necessary —a war whose purpose is “to prevent a murderer from committing his crime”. These last months, when the Czechoslovak people saw its country the target of continual menaces, lies and incitements to hatred and revolt, pressed to make concession after concession to a party led by terrorists and traitors, rewarded by an invitation to dismember itself, these last months had created in everyone a profound and firm conviction that there was something even worse than war. In the streets one saw a few people weeping—most of them women—but on the day when the Hodža Government had accepted the Franco-British ultimatum Prague had been filled with people, men as well as women, weeping without concealment. The Czechs, a pacific and humane people, responded to the mobilisation call with quiet joy.

## *Chapter VI*

### WAITING FOR THE RAID

THERE was no raid that night. We all expected one and waited for one, and in the very early hours of the morning the first alarm came through. We sat in pitch darkness in our coats, holding our gas-masks ready; but a quarter of an hour later all was over, and we took off our coats and went to bed, leaving our gas-masks by the side of the bed. We put on a small feeble lamp, smothered in scarves and sweaters, but after a few minutes there came a fiendish ringing at the bell, and we had to go down to pacify an angry air-raid warden who told us to put our light out at once. The whole air seemed humming with the sound of engines—not aeroplane engines but the engines of lorries and motor-cars busy in the mobilisation. And still no raid. So to sleep.

The next day all was quiet. Nothing seemed greatly changed, except that there were scarcely any taxis to be found, and horse-drawn carriages had come out of their hiding-places to enjoy a sudden boom. Stout old policemen who had retired for ten years or more had been brought back with them, and were trying painfully to deal with modern traffic problems. Everywhere elderly men were digging trenches; we counted eighty of them working on the half mile or so of straight road just below the villa where we were staying. Tiny street lamps designed for black-outs

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appeared, two or three inches high above the pavement, painted bright red and blue shaded, lighted with a single candle, and more and more windows were criss-crossed with bars of white and brown paper to stop the glass from splintering in a raid. But so little seemed really different. Nobody rushed to the banks to withdraw their money—not that they could have done so, had they tried, for the regulations about withdrawing money were stringent and relentless—and nobody scrambled for food. The only shops that had queues before them were those for gas-masks or for electric torches.

That Saturday morning, September 24th, the Godesberg demands arrived, and their unashamed exhibition of Hitler's predatoriness startled even the Czechoslovak Government, for the Godesberg Memorandum was an ultimatum with a time-limit of eight days. Hitler no longer demanded merely all the Czechoslovak territories where there were 50 per cent of Germans—he was not so modest; he demanded many districts where well over half the people were Czech. From all these districts the Czechoslovak Army and police were to be withdrawn by October 1st. Although Germany's propaganda—and that of her English friends—had invoked the principle of self-determination of peoples, the Godesberg Memorandum rode rough-shod over the Czech people's right to self-determination. The territory which Hitler claimed had 3,736,037 inhabitants; 816,359 of them were Czechs. Four hundred and fifty communes were purely Czech. As for the territories in which Hitler demanded a plebiscite, they contained 1,116,084 Czechs and 144,711 Germans. Economically the "new frontiers" were just as outrageous. All the main

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roads and railways would be cut, Czechoslovakia would lose not only its chief industries, but most of the raw materials it needed even for the industries which remained. The natural frontiers and the fortifications would be lost, the war industries taken away, there would be several narrow waists of territory left, none of them more than sixty kilometres wide, and no Czechoslovak Army could move from east to west or from west to east of the mutilated country. Defence would be impossible, independence non-existent for the poverty-crushed inhabitants of Hitler's Czechoslovakia.

Though the Czech people did not know these details, they did know that at Godesberg Hitler had made demands so monstrous that even Mr. Chamberlain would not ask Prague to accept them, and that both France and Great Britain had explicitly allowed them to mobilise. They forgot September 21st as if it had been only a bad dream, and they never asked themselves if the Franco-British terms bound their new Government. They thought that Hitler had saved them by irrevocable intransigence. Life seemed simple now, no longer concessions and capitulations, only defence.

For four hours that night we sat in the darkened Černín Palace, waiting with English, French and American journalists, for some ways of communicating with the outside world to be found. The Germans had cut the telephone lines between Czechoslovakia and the West, perhaps because the news from Prague seemed to them too good. The Slovak opposition had agreed during the morning to join General Syrový's Government; two members of the Slovak People's Party, Professor Karvaš and Professor Čermák, had already entered the Cabinet. At the same time the Council

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of the Slovak People's Party had agreed to continue negotiations with the Government "for the settlement of the whole mutual relationship between Czechs and Slovaks", and it issued an appeal to the Slovak people "to set an example by loyally and courageously fulfilling its duties to the Republic". How many times, in Hungarophile circles in England and in Hungary, had we not been told that all Slovaks were wishing to get away from the Czechs, and would betray them at the first opportunity! In the German districts Henlein's frantic appeals for desertions had fallen very flat. A few Henleinist recruits in frontier districts fled to Germany, but over 90 per cent joined up at once and the German Democrat students in Prague sent a deputation to the Ministry of Education to offer themselves for the defence of the Republic.

By Saturday, too, foreign volunteers were beginning to appear. The Bulgarian students in Prague offered themselves for service, so did fifty-eight Bulgarian gardeners, who asked to be allowed "to exchange their spades for arms". German and Austrian refugees volunteered in hundreds. Fifty Roumanians appeared, travelling from their villages in goods trucks and on the couplings of trains. In Jugoslavia, volunteers, deputations, telegrams and letters were flooding the Czechoslovak Legation and Consulates. In Zagreb a "National Council for the defence of Czechoslovakia" was busy organising volunteers in towns and villages. In the cafés only the Prague wireless station was to be heard, and "Hej Slované" was sung everywhere. The Jugoslav intellectuals sent a message to the Czechoslovak writers, declaring that "All Serbs, Croats and Slovenes feel the same boundless sympathy for Czechoslovakia now, and for her struggle for right, as the

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Czechs and the Slovaks before and during the World War had felt for Jugoslavia's fight for freedom and independence. They support Czechoslovakia in her struggle now with all their strength, for they are convinced that in so doing they serve truth and brotherhood, as well as the interests of their own people."

All of them, Sudeten German democrats, German émigrés, Bulgarians, Jugoslavs, realised quite clearly what many people in England and France had not yet realised: that if Czechoslovakia were deserted and dismembered it might well mean the end of individual liberty in the whole of Europe. As the great theologian, Karl Barth, wrote to a Professor of the Hus Faculty in Prague University, "the most frightful thing is the possibility that England, France and America, and even we in Switzerland, might forget that with the freedom of your people stands and falls to-day the fate of man's liberty in Europe, and perhaps not only in Europe.... Every Czech soldier who struggles and suffers will struggle and suffer for us too, and also (I say it to-day without hesitation) for the Church of God."

The Czechoslovak Government of course rejected the ultimatum of Godesberg. It did so in a letter which Mr. Jan Masaryk, son of President Masaryk and Czechoslovak Minister in London, handed to Lord Halifax on September 25th. But this letter<sup>1</sup> included a fatal sentence: "My new Government, headed by General Syrový, declared that they accept full responsibility for their predecessors' decision to accept the stern terms of the so-called Anglo-French plan". We vividly remember how at the time this seemed to us

<sup>1</sup> For the full text, see the British White Paper of September (Cmd. 5847), pp. 16-18. See also below, Chapter VIII, p. iii.

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fatal, how we already smelt Munich in the air, for it was clear to us that as long as Czechoslovakia consented to the proposals of September 19th Hitler had only to come a little way back towards them and he would find Great Britain and France once more on his side against the Czechs. This he could do at any time and he would almost certainly do it. Nobody else seemed to think so. Alas that we were right.

## Chapter VII

# SELF-DETERMINATION

MEANWHILE what effect did the betrayal committed by France and Great Britain, on September 19th, have in the Sudetenland? Lord Runciman wrote on September 21st: "Unless, therefore, Herr Henlein's *Freikorps* are deliberately encouraged to cross the frontier, I have no reason to expect any notable renewal of incidents and disturbances. In these circumstances the necessity for the presence of State Police in these districts should no longer exist." While he was writing that judgment, two factors were encouraging a "notable renewal of incidents and disturbances". Herr Henlein's *Freikorps* were, in fact, breaking across the frontier, and the treachery of the Western Powers had revived the Neapolitan courage of some of the late Sudeten party's hooligans.

All through the agonising days of diplomatic negotiation, the Czechoslovak Government was harassed by continual reports from the Sudeten districts: armed bands had crossed the frontier, burnt down customs-houses and police stations, killed or carried off to Germany the frontier guards and customs officers. The Government and the General Staff were between two fires. The British and French Governments were constantly urging them to avoid incidents by not taking military measures; at the same time any disorder, if they

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let it develop, would be used against them. At the very moment when Mr. Chamberlain, according to the Prague correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*,<sup>1</sup> was asking the Czechoslovak Government to "make a general appeal to the population, particularly in the mixed language areas, asking them to avoid incidents", and when Mr. Newton was telling Dr. Smutný<sup>2</sup> that the Czech people must not "take vengeance on their German fellow citizens"—at that very moment Czechs were being wounded and murdered by German Storm-troopers and by Henlein's *Freikorps*.

The police in Falkenau reported to Prague on September 20th at 1.30 P.M. that

As far as it has been ascertained, it is to be expected that both the Gendarmes Sergeant Eduard Šimon and Sergeant Jan Samko (Slovak) have been carried off to Germany, and with them the Customs Inspector František Reřich. The customs-house is burnt to the ground. At the time of the attack a gendarmerie guard was in or near the customs-house, which was attacked from several sides, and shot at from machine guns and rifles. Powerful detonations at the time when the attack began show that the attackers used hand grenades, or that the besieged defended themselves with them. During the attack the Customs Officer Fendrych, who was in the customs-house, managed to escape through the window. One Customs Officer is said to be wounded, and four people from the S.O.S.<sup>3</sup> guard.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, September 24th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> A high official of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office.

<sup>3</sup> A frontier defence organisation.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 43/1938, Section B.

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At 2.45 in the afternoon, Jičín reported:

As to the attack on the customs-house in Malá Úpa, I beg to report that the Commander of the S.O.S. battalion, Major Wurm, made inquiries on the spot: (1) He confirms this morning's report on the attack on the customs-house in Horní Malá Úpa in full detail; (2) as for the two gendarmes and the Customs Officers who have disappeared, it cannot be ascertained whether they have been burnt to death in the building, as it is impossible to enter the customs-house for the heat, or whether they have been carried off to the Reich. Of the three wounded Customs Officers, one is slightly and two are seriously wounded, though they are not in danger. The defenders' situation was difficult, as the customs-house is directly on the frontier, and they were not allowed to shoot across the frontier, and also because a crowd of women and children blocked their way.<sup>1</sup>

The same day Strakonice reported at 3.30 P.M.:

To-day, 20/9/1938, at 13.30 P.M., citizens from Žďárek (political district of Prachatice), S.d.P. members who had fled across the Bavarian frontier, inveigled the citizen Fuchs from Žďárek, a German Social Democrat, into the forest across the German frontier. They shot at him five times—it is not known whether from rifles or pistols—and have wounded him very seriously (one shot through the lungs). The citizen Fuchs dragged himself across into our country, where the Customs Officers looked after him and noted the names of the four attackers, according to Fuchs's information. With the help

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 38/1938, Section 14B.

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of other Customs Officers they took Fuchs home and called a doctor.<sup>1</sup>

From Falkenau on the evening of September 21st the garrison commander's office reported at 9.25 p.m.:

The Commander of the S.O.S. battalion in Falkenau reports at 20.45: The situation is developing; the Henlein people are demanding at the police station that the town should be given up. As soon as the first shot is fired, the Sudeten Legions will cross the frontier. As to the Ministry of the Interior's orders that weapons are not to be used against the demonstrators, and owing to the brainlessness of the political offices, I have ordered that members of the S.O.S. should do their duty and should use arms against anyone who crosses the frontier. . . . The garrison Commander in Eger will also not capitulate.<sup>2</sup>

On Thursday and Friday, September 22nd and 23rd, according to the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Prague, "what was in progress along the Sudeten frontier . . . was something which in any other circumstances could be called German guerilla warfare". He goes on:

At a number of points German Storm-troopers and members of the Sudeten German "Free Corps", formed and armed in Germany, made attacks on Customs posts, post-offices, and other public buildings along the frontier. In some cases these marauding bands sent in by Germany received the assistance of local Nazis. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 43/1938, Section 14B.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 53/1938, Section 14B.

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Arrested Storm-troopers who were masquerading as Sudeten Germans, expressed general astonishment at finding the Czechoslovak police on duty and defending themselves. They said they had all been told in Germany that Czechoslovakia had handed over the territory and they would meet with no resistance.

The following are the official details of the casualties in what the German official reports describe as massacres by a brutal Czech soldiery of "defenceless Sudeten men and women".

In Schluckenau, German Black Guards and Storm-troopers crossed the frontier, but withdrew promptly when gendarmerie arrived. In České Hamry ten Czechoslovak frontier guards and eight soldiers were attacked by a band of Nazi raiders from Germany and inflicted casualties the number of which is unknown.

At Libenau, a policeman named Jakl was captured and murdered by the Nazis. German Nazis throwing hand grenades and firing revolvers at the frontier post in Weipert killed a Czechoslovak Customs Officer.

In similar attacks from Germany, delivered on posts at Jáchymov, Vidnava, Kladruby, Annenthal and Bromau, there were altogether thirteen persons killed and twenty-four badly wounded. One of those killed was a Czechoslovak sentry who was shot from behind while on guard....

It would appear that Mr. Chamberlain is not aware that the recent skirmishes were not incidents between Czech and German citizens of this Republic, but were deliberately launched from German soil.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, September 24th, 1938.

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Launched from German soil, and armed from Germany—that they were. The Commander of the S.O.S. battalion in Moravská Ostrava reported by telephone at 4.20 P.M. on September 21st:

On September 21st, 1938, about 1.20 A.M., the S.O.S. guard inspector Josef Holbach and Inspector Karel Vidlák, noticed lantern signals from the outskirts of the commune of Třeboň. As they were examining the cause of these signals they met at the edge of the village with a group of about 10-15 men, who moved suspiciously towards them. The S.O.S. guard fired to give the alarm; they were immediately attacked, about twenty shots from guns and pistols were fired at them, and they were forced to retreat. When the attackers no longer had the S.O.S. guard in front of them they withdrew into the village, but at a bend in the road they met another S.O.S. guard, composed of three inspectors, who were coming to help the first guard. The attackers called out "Halt" and at once there was a roar of guns and automatic pistols from the ditch. A member of the guard, Inspector Stanislav Dobrý, threw a hand grenade at the attackers and the other members of the guard returned the fire. The grenade had no results, as it fell behind the group. The whole scene was illuminated by flames, which the attackers made use of to aim better; they fired about thirty shots. Inspector Dobrý threw another grenade, the explosion of which forced the attackers to retire. At the same time a cry of pain was heard; one of the attackers lay dead, struck by the exploding grenade. The dead man, whose identity could not be discovered, had in his

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pocket several Reichsgerman cartridges, 7.90 mm. in calibre.

Shortly before this battle there was another battle at the other end of Třeboň, near the customs-house, where there was a cross fire from two S.O.S. guards who had been attacked by a pistol shot. The number of the attackers is not known. The guard fired about four shots, and the attackers ran away. In the fields west of Třeboň, in the early morning, another dead man, whose identity is unknown, was found.

The finance controller<sup>1</sup> Emil Vodička, who was asleep in his private house near the place of the first struggle, went mad during the night; the full circumstances are not yet known.

At the spot where the battle took place and the grenade exploded, there were found twelve cartridges of Reichsgerman origin—also an automatic pistol of Reichsgerman origin marked “Waffenfabrik Mauser Überndorf a. Neckar”, 852,116 calibre about 8 mm. with nine cartridges.<sup>2</sup>

Sudeten German Social Democrats have told me that Henlein's *Freikorps* had machine-guns and hand grenades galore—but no artillery. The German Army, in the days before Munich, sat on the frontier watching the Czechoslovak soldiers, with their tanks, clearing up Warnsdorf, Rumburg and the frontier towns. It had strict orders not to fire a single round with its artillery, for that might have meant war. Murder done with machine-guns, rifles, hand grenades, Storm-troopers, means nothing, but artillery means war.

<sup>1</sup> A minor Civil Service officer.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 83/1938, Section 14B.

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The Poles were not slow to imitate the Germans. On September 26th Moravská Ostrava reported to Prague at 5 P.M.:

On the 25/9/1938, at 21 o'clock, the S.O.S. guard No. 108—Černá Zastávka—was attacked by civilians (Poles); one of the attackers was killed, another wounded.

During the night of the 25th to 26th September, 1938, 40-50 people under the command of the teacher Sýkora crossed the Czechoslovak frontier from Poland. Their instructions were to divide into three groups (Jablunkov, Mosty, Návsi), and to slaughter the Czech inhabitants. The S.O.S. guard was informed of this in time and resisted the attack, a platoon lying in wait for the group in the forest. They captured nine civilians, taking from them thirty-three hand grenades, seventeen pistols, eight kilograms of cartridges, and bandages for wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Chamberlain in Godesberg wrote to Herr Hitler that he could "ask the Czech Government whether they think there could be an arrangement under which the maintenance of law and order in certain agreed Sudeten German areas would be entrusted to the Sudeten Germans themselves—by the creation of a suitable force, or by the use of forces already in existence, possibly acting under the supervision of neutral observers".<sup>2</sup> Entrusted to the Sudeten Germans—to which Sudeten Germans? To the million loyal Germans within the Republic, or to Henlein's freebooters? "By the creation of a suitable force, or by the use of forces already in existence"—what forces were likely to be suitable

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 88/1938, Section 14B.

<sup>2</sup> British White Paper, Cmd. 5847, September, 1938.

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to the purposes of a Hitler? Can Mr. Chamberlain have been so wholly ignorant of what was really happening in the Sudeten German districts as this proposal suggests? Surely he must have known that throughout the Sudetenland, except for the frontier districts, there was perfect order, and that in the frontier districts it was a struggle not between Czech and German fellow-citizens, but between the Czechoslovak authorities and invaders from the Reich. Mr. Chamberlain appears to have been either ill-informed or disingenuous.

All through the week before Munich, and especially after Hitler's speech of September 26th, the attacks went on. Reports of them poured into the Ministry of the Interior. České Budějovice reported on September 29th, at 9.30 P.M., that there were constant attacks from across the frontier, always on isolated S.O.S. units.

The attacks are led [the report went on] by greatly superior numbers of men in civilian clothes and in khaki uniforms, equipped with light and heavy machine-guns. The S.O.S. divisions are exhausted by these uninterrupted attacks. Nobody on our side has been killed or wounded, but many are ill. The enemy takes all his wounded back with him. As a result of these attacks, our reconnaissance line has been pushed back.<sup>1</sup>

On the same day, at 6.55 in the evening, Falkenau reported:

At 9 o'clock Kraslice reports that according to reliable information the families of those S.O.S. members who remained behind have to cross the

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document 108/1938, Section 14B.

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frontier by tomorrow afternoon, and Kraslice must be taken and occupied without regard to the results of Munich. At 10.30 Franzensbad reports that during the occupation of Horní Loman by our units, who drove back the attackers, there was a cross fire between our units and uniformed F.S. men, of whom three were killed. The identity of the killed is being ascertained. At 11 o'clock Joachimsthal reports that according to reports from the people of Český Wiesenthal eight dead were found after the attack of September 27th near Český Wiesenthal. Among them a reserve N.C.O. of the Czechoslovak army, Techner, the son of the school teacher in Český Wiesenthal, who took part in the military measures in May of this year, but later fled across the frontier as an S.d.P. *Ordner*. Franzensbad further reports at 18.20 o'clock that from Antonienhöhe the enemy is advancing in considerable force along the ditches towards Horní Loman. There has been no fighting yet.<sup>1</sup>

And on September 28th and 29th, at Plesná (near Eger), which was captured by the *Freikorps*, "every man between 18 and 50 years old was mobilised for Hitler's foreign legion".<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this terror, in spite of a campaign of abuse from the official German Press and wireless which for sheer beastliness has never been equalled, on September 27th a group of Sudeten German leaders in Czechoslovakia issued this proclamation:

We express the feelings of over a million Sudeten German democrats, Catholics, Socialists, Commun-

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 107/1938, Section 14B.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Document No. 102/1938, Section 14B.

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ists, and one hundred thousand former members of the Henlein party. . . .

We solemnly declare that the majority of our Sudeten German people are opposed to joining the third Reich. We are completely united with Czechoslovak democracy in the will to defend the Republic, its democratic institutions and its territorial integrity, against any attack. . . . Henlein has no right to proclaim in the name of the Sudeten Germans, Hitler's plan for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. *The votes which were given to the Henlein party never authorised him to carry through an Anschluss*, far less to do it by provoking a world war.

Inside Czechoslovakia its German citizens were offering themselves not in thousands but in hundreds of thousands for its defence.

And yet Lord Runciman wrote of the "predominantly German" areas of Czechoslovakia that "a very large majority of their inhabitants desire amalgamation with Germany".

Chapter VIII

THE PRIMROSE PATH TO MUNICH

“*WIR wollen Krieg, wir wollen Krieg*” (We want war, we want war)—this was the cry heard from the assembly of Nazis who listened in “organised devotion” to Herr Hitler’s speech in the Berlin Sportpalast on September 26th, 1938.<sup>1</sup> “I have made Herr Beneš an offer”, Hitler shouted, “it is nothing other than the realisation of what he himself has promised. Now he has war or peace in his hands. Either he will accept this offer and give the Sudeten Germans freedom at last, or we will come and fetch this freedom. . . . Beneš will have to hand over this territory to us on October 1st.” To most Czechs it looked as if Hitler had committed himself, this time irrevocably, to a demand which nobody would expect them to accept. And it seemed that war must be really coming. Would they be alone? They could not believe they would.

On the morning after Hitler’s speech they read in their newspapers the “authoritative statement” which the British Foreign Office had issued the evening before: “If, in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister, a German attack is made on Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will

<sup>1</sup> Not widely reported in the British Press, but mentioned by the Prague wireless and confirmed by many who listened to Hitler’s speech.

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be bound to come to her assistance and that Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France". Their own mobilisation was complete, their frontiers ready, every Czechoslovak soldier already at his post; France had extended her mobilisation measures; on the evening of the 27th Great Britain had announced the mobilisation of the fleet. From Moscow, the same day, came a Havas dispatch declaring that the Soviet government "is determined to fulfil all its engagements, and to intervene on behalf of Czechoslovakia with all its force" and "is also willing to open military conversations with France and England for a close military co-operation".<sup>1</sup>

Roumania and Jugoslavia had threatened Budapest that they would march if Hungary attacked Czechoslovakia. Bulgaria and Jugoslavia were already "*brüderlich an Seite Prags*". When the first group of Czechoslovak and Bulgarian volunteers left Sofia there was a huge demonstration. The whole Czech colony, with the Minister at its head, and thousands of Bulgarians went to the station; the Bulgarians sang Czech and Slovak songs, shouted to the volunteers, "Return soon victorious", and when the train left, Bulgarian students seized the Czechoslovak Minister and carried him shoulder-high through the streets. In Jugoslavia the Sokols sent to M. Stojadinović a message declaring that they were "ready for all sacrifices" for Czechoslovakia and believed in "a victory for right and justice", and the same day the leader of the United Serb opposition handed a message of sympathy, friendship and loyalty to the Czechoslovak Minister. From all over Jugoslavia came messages and volunteers; it

<sup>1</sup> *Prager Tag-Blatt*, September 28th, 1938, *Prager Presse*, September 29th, 1938.

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was quite certain where the Jugoslav people would be if war started.

Even with Poland relations seemed better. The Czech people knew that direct negotiations had been begun with Poland, and they hoped that at last this bitter and futile quarrel would be brought to an end.

And the Slovaks? On the evening of Tuesday, the 27th, Karel Sidor, the editor-in-chief of *Slovák*, and the most violent, radical and unscrupulous of all Slovak autonomists, broadcast to the Slovak people. "I tell you, Slovaks", he said, "that the deputy leader of the Slovak People's party, Dr. Josef Tiso, has twice been in contact with President Beneš, and has achieved everything that our Slovak people needs to live in its own way in its country and in Czechoslovakia". Earlier in the day the Slovak writers had issued a proclamation:

The Czechoslovak State has opened the way to a free national existence to us Slovaks. Within it we began a life which will bring us as equals into the cultural community of free peoples. With it we live and fall. We feel the fateful necessity for the closest co-operation with the Czechs in the task of defending our State. We call to all Czechs and Slovaks: "We would rather not be than be slaves".

And the *Slovenský Deník*, in its leading article on September 29th, furiously denounced Hitler's attempt to divide the Slovaks from the Czechs. It wrote:

Hitler declared . . . that it is a lie to speak of unity between Czechs and Slovaks. He even said that it is a lie which our present President, Dr. Beneš, has fathered. Both the one assertion and the other are

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shameful untruths. We do not demand of Hitler that in these mad and hectic times he should take a book in his hand and inform himself as to the real facts. We do not demand that he should read carefully what our immortal Slovak hero, General Štefánik, wrote and said about this question. We do not demand of him that he should study the whole history of our twenty-year-old Czechoslovak State, and of the life together of the Czechs and Slovaks within this state. . . . But we do demand of him that he should speak the truth. If he does not know the truth, then let him keep silence. . . .

We Slovaks went into our State all together, and we mean to go on with the Czechs for ever in this way, just as our brothers, the Legionaries, decided to go; just as the nation decided on May 1st, 1918; just as we ourselves decided on October 30th, 1918—all of us, without exception. If anybody, either abroad or at home here, from ideological conceptions tries to forge himself a weapon against the Czechoslovak Republic from the party political squabbles which prevailed among us a short while ago, or from the ideologies which opposed Slovak peculiarities to Czech idiosyncrasies, he is making the greatest possible mistake. That will succeed for nobody, and not even for Hitler.

So much for Slovak disloyalty.

September 28th was St. Wenceslas' Day, the day of Bohemia's national saint, the Bohemian prince martyred in the tenth century. All day crowds gathered round his statue in the Václavské Náměstí, crowds of women and children and soldiers. Flowers covered the steps of the statue, were hung on the figure itself—

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flowers in opulent bouquets and wreaths, flowers in tight bunches, flowers in a handful tied with string, single flowers scattered. This was not a yearly custom; in former years there had been two or three flowers, no more. In the cathedral the faithful crowded in prayer before the saints' relics—his skull, his golden crown, his helmet, his sword and his coat of mail. His sword should have been given that day to General Syrový. At the last moment the ceremony was put off. Was it a bad omen? Nobody thought so. They were so sure that no new sacrifice could be demanded of them.

Imagine that in between the rejection of Godesberg and the news of Munich nothing had happened, except what we have told already in this chapter. Imagine how wholly senseless and cruel the news of Munich would then seem. Many Czechs, it is true, wondered uneasily why Hitler's bombers had not come during their mobilisation: something must have happened; he must have some ground for thinking he could still get all he wanted without war. But to most Czechs, in those days between the mobilisation and Munich, it seemed as if God was in his heaven once more, as if—even though the irreplaceable beauty of ancient Prague might be bombed to ruins—all was right with the world; perhaps the terrible sacrifice they had made to the cause of world peace at the eleventh hour had won over Great Britain and France to stand by them, and perhaps Great Britain and France had at last understood that in Czechoslovakia the issue was the future of freedom in Europe. Then suddenly a new, brutal betrayal. Why? Why?

\* \* \*

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All this time diplomacy was feverishly busy. Although the British Minister handed on the Godesberg Memorandum to the Czechoslovak Government "with the additional information that His Majesty's Government is acting solely as an intermediary and is neither advising nor pressing . . . in any way",<sup>1</sup> the Czechoslovak Government was, in fact, under pressure again from its apparent friends. Even when he was still at Godesberg and was asked if the situation was hopeless, Mr. Chamberlain replied: "It is up to the Czechs now"—a remark whose only effect could be to lessen the sympathy of public opinion for a Czech refusal of demands he dared not formally press them to accept. Formally, too, as soon as the Syrový Government was formed, President Beneš had been pressed for an assurance that the new Government also accepted the Anglo-French plan. The President gave this assurance. Of this the Czech people knew nothing.<sup>2</sup>

On Sunday, September 25th, the Czechoslovak Government received a British communication which said:

The Prime Minister hopes that any reply of the Czechoslovak Government to the German memorandum will be transmitted through him. If the

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, 1938, Document No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> We ourselves heard of it on September 29th. Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons on September 28th: "It has been emphasised in Prague that this Government (the Syrový Government) is not a military dictatorship and has accepted the Anglo-French proposals". And according to M. Paul Allard (on p. 164 of his book *Le Quai d'Orsay*), M. Bonnet gave "imperative instructions" to the French Minister in Prague to inform Dr. Beneš that "the French Government, and the British Government likewise, would disinterest itself in the events that might follow if the new Czechoslovak Government did not keep the engagements made by the old one". (M. Allard says this happened on the night of September 20th-21st, but this is clearly a slip.)

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Czechoslovak Government finds it possible and desires to send a representative to London to treat this question, we shall welcome him gladly, on Monday if possible.<sup>1</sup>

Already on the Sunday afternoon Mr. Jan Masaryk handed to Lord Halifax the letter in which the Czechoslovak Government rejected the Godesberg demands. What were its reasons? The letter says:

The proposals go far beyond what we agreed to in the so-called Anglo-French plan. They deprive us of every safeguard for our national existence. We are to yield up large proportions of our carefully prepared defences, and admit the German armies deep into our country before we have been able to organise it on the new basis or make any preparation for its defence. Our national and economic independence would automatically disappear with the acceptance of Herr Hitler's plan. The whole process of moving the population is to be reduced to panic flight on the part of those who will not accept the German Nazi régime. They have to leave their homes without even the right to take their personal belongings or, even in the case of peasants, their cow.<sup>2</sup>

But this Czechoslovak reply contained something else of great importance—a reminder:

His Majesty's and the French governments are very well aware that we agreed under the most severe pressure to the so-called Anglo-French plan for ceding parts of Czechoslovakia. *We accepted this*

<sup>1</sup> Translated back into English from the Czechoslovak Foreign Office version.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 5847, 1938, Document No. 7.

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*plan under extreme duress. We had not even time to make any representations about its many unworkable features. Nevertheless, we accepted it because we understood that it was the end of the demands to be made upon us, and because it followed from the Anglo-French pressure that these two Powers would accept responsibility for our reduced frontiers and would guarantee us their support in the event of our being feloniously attacked. . . .*

My new Government, headed by General Syrový, declared that they accept full responsibility for their predecessors' decision to accept the stern terms of the so-called Anglo-French plan.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, in spite of this reminder and in spite of the Czechoslovak Government's Note of September 21st<sup>2</sup> (which had accepted the Franco-British proposals *as a whole* and on the assumption that territories to be ceded *should remain Czechoslovak* until the proposed international commission had fixed the new frontiers finally), Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons on September 28th that the Czechoslovak Government had accepted the Anglo-French plan "unconditionally".<sup>3</sup>

Why did the Czechoslovak Government accept the Anglo-French plan, reject the demands of Godesberg? The Anglo-French plan, too, was a grave menace to Czechoslovak independence, strategic and economic, since the areas it would have transferred included most of the natural frontiers of Bohemia and a great deal of its industry and raw materials; and the Anglo-French plan was already a violation of self-determination, since

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, 1938, Document No. 7. Our italics.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted above, Chapter IV, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, col. 17.

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in the areas it would have transferred not only were half the people Czech but of the other half many were anti-Nazi or non-Nazi.

The truth is that the Czechoslovak Government accepted the Anglo-French plan because it was forced, and rejected the Godesberg demands because it was allowed. The Czechoslovak Government refused the Godesberg demands not for its own reasons but for Mr. Chamberlain's. And what were his? Not sympathy for Czechoslovakia: if he had cared for the Czechs or for the non-Nazi Sudeten Germans he would hardly have imposed the Anglo-French plan. Mr. Chamberlain's reason for risking war to reject the demands of Godesberg but not those of Berchtesgaden was fear of public opinion. He told the House of Commons:

“I dwelt with all the emphasis at my command on the risks which would be incurred by insisting on such terms, and on the terrible consequences of a war, if war ensued. I declared that the language and the manner of the document, which I described as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum, would profoundly shock public opinion in neutral countries. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

And he wrote to Hitler at Godesberg:

I do not think you have realised the impossibility of my agreeing to put forward any plan unless I have reason to suppose that it will be considered by public opinion in my country, in France, and indeed, in the world generally, as carrying out the principles already agreed upon in an orderly fashion and free from the threat of force.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, September 28, 1938, col. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 5847, 1938, Document No. 8.

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Public opinion would accept the idea of cutting from Bohemia the districts where half the people were German, because at first sight a fifty-fifty division always looks fair, and the man-in-the-street of distant countries would not know or be quick to imagine what it is like to be an anti-Nazi German or a Czech whose home is suddenly in the land of concentration camps. But public opinion would not swallow the predatory frontiers of the Godesberg memorandum or an immediate military occupation—not, at least, till after a full-scale war scare. This was the reason why Czechoslovakia could reject the Godesberg demands; the determining factor was not right but might, the actual balance of forces, political as well as military.

And yet for Czechoslovakia too—not only for Mr. Chamberlain—there might have been a real difference between the demands of Godesberg, and the Anglo-French plan *as Prague had accepted it*. But Great Britain and France did not respect the conditions on which, under extreme duress, the Czechoslovak Government had accepted their proposals of September 19th.

That same afternoon, September 25th, Mr. Chamberlain sent through Mr. Jan Masaryk a question to Prague. If Mr. Chamberlain were to make a last effort to persuade Herr Hitler to consider another method of peaceful settlement, this time through “an international conference attended by Germany, Czechoslovakia and other Powers which would consider the Anglo-French plan and the best method of bringing it into operation”, would the Czechoslovak Government be prepared to take part?<sup>1</sup> This question was in effect something very like a trap. How could the Czechoslovak Government refuse? Yet if it consented, to

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, 1938, Document No. 8.

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what was it consenting? Who were the "other Powers" to be? Would the Conference include Russia, the United States or some Power that would really dare to uphold the vital interests of Czechoslovakia? Or would the "other Powers" be only the four, Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain? This would mean in effect a Conference between Germany, Germany, Germany and Germany—and Czechoslovakia, as the Conference of Munich turned out to be, except that it omitted the formality of admitting a Czechoslovak delegate to its deliberations.

The Czechoslovak Government's answer reached Lord Halifax next day. It ran:

The Czechoslovak Government would be ready to take part in an international conference where Germany and Czechoslovakia, among other nations, would be represented, to find a different method of settling the Sudeten German question from that expounded in Herr Hitler's proposals, keeping in mind the possible reverting to the Anglo-French plan. . . . The Czechoslovak Government, having accepted the Anglo-French Note under the most severe pressure and extreme duress, had no time to make any representations regarding its many unworkable features. The Czechoslovak Government presumes that, if a conference were to take place, this fact would not be overlooked by those taking part in it.

And Mr. Jan Masaryk, in his letter transmitting this reply, added this sentence: "My Government, after the experiences of the last few weeks, would consider it more than fully justifiable to ask for definite and binding guarantees to the effect that no unexpected action of an

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aggressive nature would take place during the negotiations, and that the Czechoslovak defence system would remain intact during that period.”<sup>1</sup> Here again are the explicit conditions on which the Czechoslovak Government had surrendered.

Next day, Tuesday, September 27th, Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed to Dr. Beneš at 5.40 P.M. :

I feel myself obliged to communicate to you and to the Czechoslovak Government that the information which His Majesty’s Government now possesses from Berlin makes it clear that the German army will receive orders to cross the Czechoslovak frontier almost immediately if to-morrow at two o’clock the Czechoslovak Government does not accept the German conditions. This must lead to Bohemia being militarily overrun, and *nothing that another power or powers could do could prevent this fate* for your own country and people. And this remains true whatever may be the final result of a possible world war. His Majesty’s Government cannot take the responsibility of advising you as to what you should do, but it considers that this information should reach you immediately.<sup>2</sup>

Some people will consider this a warning, others a threat.

Close after this message a new British proposal, a “time-table” for the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany, reached Prague. With it came a clear threat:

Please inform the Czechoslovak Government immediately that now, when the Czechoslovak Govern-

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, Document No. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Translated back into English from the Czechoslovak Foreign Office version. Our italics.

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ment has given its agreement in principle to the cession of the territory of Sudetenland to the Reich, we find ourselves before the difficulty of reaching agreement on the actual procedure for the cession. The Czechoslovak Government has refused to consider the proposal, which Herr Hitler made, to occupy militarily the whole territory on Oct. 1st and His Majesty's Government is in agreement with the Czechoslovak Government in considering that that is not reasonable.

The attached plan gives, in conformity with the judgment of His Majesty's Government, the possibility of elaborating measures which His Majesty's Government considers as substantial conditions for the transfer, and His Majesty's Government demands very seriously that the Czechoslovak Government should give its full co-operation with the aim of realising this time-table. His Majesty's Government is fully conscious of the difficulties which the Czechoslovak Government may feel in accepting this plan, and also the material difficulties which may come to light during its execution. His Majesty's Government has arrived at the conclusion that the proposal must be accepted, and that it should hand it on and take full responsibility for its execution. The Czechoslovak Government must realise clearly that the only alternative to this plan would be the dismemberment of the country by violent means, and while this might have as its consequence a general conflict which would involve incalculable loss of life, there is no possibility that at the end of this conflict, whatever its outcome might be, Czechoslovakia might again have the present frontiers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Re-translated into English from the Czech.

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The British "time-table" itself proposed that the Germans should occupy the territory of Eger and Asch outside the Czechoslovak fortifications on October 1st, and that on October 3rd two commissions should meet, a Boundary Commission and a Commission of Plenipotentiaries. Observers, a contingent of the British Legion, and later four battalions of the British Army, would be sent out and placed under the orders of the Boundary Commission. The business of the Commission of Plenipotentiaries would be to make arrangements for the immediate withdrawal of the Czechoslovak Army and State Police; to settle on general lines how the minorities should be protected, a right of option exercised and property removed; and to settle what instructions should be given to the Boundary Commission on the basis of the Anglo-French plan. On October 10th German troops should enter the districts for which the arrangements might be declared complete by the Plenipotentiaries Commission; and the Boundary Commission must have fixed the final frontiers by October 31st, the Czechoslovak troops and police withdrawing by this date. Later the Plenipotentiaries Commission should meet to consider if the Boundary Commission's frontier could be improved—"taking into consideration the geographic and economic necessities in the various communes"—and if local plebiscites would be necessary or desirable. Later still "the stage would be reached for negotiations between Germany, Great Britain, France and Czechoslovakia about demobilisation and a guarantee".<sup>1</sup>

That same evening, Tuesday, the 27th, Mr. Chamberlain made his famous broadcast, in which he said:

"How horribly fantastic and incredible it is that

<sup>1</sup> For full text of this time-table see Appendix I.

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we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.

... However much we may sympathise with a small nation confronted by a big powerful neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight it must be on larger issues than that. . . .

“If I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel it must be resisted. Under such domination, the life of people who believe in liberty would not be worth living, but war is a fearful thing and we must be very clear before we embark on it that it is really the great issues that are at stake. . . .”

In Czechoslovakia the phrase, “people of whom we know nothing” caused great anger. Not only that, but people were bewildered, for as they said, “Can it really be that Chamberlain still does not see that the great issues are at stake now and that the rulers of Germany are in fact bent on a domination of the world, under which the life of people who believe in liberty will not be worth living? How can he think that this is just a frontier quarrel, many hundreds of miles away?” The speech also contained a threat, where it said of Hitler’s attitude at Godesberg:

“If it arises out of any doubt Herr Hitler feels about the intention of the Czech Government to carry out their promise and hand over the territory, I have offered on the part of the British Government to guarantee their word, and I am sure the value of our promise will not be underrated anywhere.”

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This threat made the Czech people begin to see that they were in a trap, that the capitulation of September 21st still bound them hand and foot for all their magnificent manifestation of their will to face death and bereavement and ruin for freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Late that same night Dr. Krofta, Czechoslovak Foreign Secretary, came back from the Cabinet meeting, at which the President had presided, and spoke with his collaborators in the Foreign Office. The following is a jotting made by one of them at the time, of all he told them:

- (1) Mr. Newton brought to the President of the Republic the communication, which the Legation had received at 17.30. According to this, Mr. Chamberlain considered it his duty to draw the attention of the Czechoslovak Government to the danger of 2 P.M. on the 28th.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) When Newton, having made this communication, had returned from the President of the Republic, he made a request from the Legation for a new visit to Minister Krofta, saying that he had a new dispatch from London. He was

<sup>1</sup> Already in the small hours of September 27th, after listening to Hitler's bellicose speech, Mr. Chamberlain had given to the Press a statement containing this threat: "It is evident that the Chancellor has no faith that the promises made will be carried out. These promises were made, not to the German Government, but to the British and French Governments in the first instance. Speaking for the British Government, we regard ourselves as morally responsible for seeing that the promises are carried out fairly and fully, and we are prepared to undertake that they shall be carried out with all reasonable promptitude, provided that the German Government will agree to the settlement of terms and conditions of transfer by discussion and not by force." Next day, in his message to Hitler, Mr. Chamberlain added to this threat, saying: "*You cannot doubt the power* of the British and French Governments to see that the promises are carried out fairly and fully *and forthwith*". (The italics are ours.)

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 116.

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received by the Minister at 9.20 [*sic*] and handed him a Note, containing a new British proposal made to Hitler, of how to execute the transfer in the spirit of the proposals of Berchtesgaden. (To give up on the 3rd of October the region of Cheb, the Czechoslovak Commission, the British Legion, afterwards our demobilisation, understanding on the guarantee).<sup>1</sup> When Newton received this dispatch he asked London, as he told Minister Krofta, "*ob es nicht überholt ist*".<sup>2</sup> He received the answer that he should in any case give the communication.

- (3) Finally Mr. Newton said to Mr. Krofta: "He has instructions to draw the attention of the Czechoslovak Government to abandon all political manœuvres and to begin immediately conversations with Poland about the cession of the territory with a Polish majority. If British mediation were necessary, the English are ready to give it."

Still further the British Minister read out an instruction addressed to the Embassy in Berlin: "The British Government recognises that it is necessary to make the final attempt, and that that which it proposes is in agreement with the declaration of the Czechoslovak Government". (This concerns the new proposals.) Hitler has said that President Beneš and the Czechoslovak Republic will not keep their word. For this reason he<sup>3</sup> told Hitler in London that he should

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Newton spoke in German and these words are given in German in the text.

<sup>3</sup> That is, Mr. Chamberlain in his statement commenting on Hitler's Sportpalast speech. See the passage quoted above, p. 120, n. 1.

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have confidence in England. Hitler wants to occupy the Sudeten territory by the first of October. For this reason it is necessary to act quickly and the British Government proposes a plan. Ambassador Henderson<sup>1</sup> must show it to Hitler with the remark that the French Government has given its consent in principle. London is sending it at the same time to the Czechoslovak Government with the observation that it is only in this way that the cession of territory can be carried out in an orderly way.

This document is worth study. It reveals the British Government using two forms of pressure against the Czechs. One is that the British Government had hinted to Berlin that the Czechs would have France against them if they did not accept the British time-table unconditionally. A more direct incitement to intransigence and greed could hardly be imagined. The other concerns Poland. After September 21st the Czechs had had one hope of a way out from their utter dependence on France and Great Britain, to win over Poland, at least to neutrality. It may be that President Beneš himself always thought that, whatever Poland might do, Czechoslovakia would have to give in to Hitler if France deserted her; but certainly, to many of the highest Czechoslovak soldiers the question of Poland was decisive, for (they thought) against Germany alone Czechoslovakia had a good chance of holding her own, but not with Poland and Hungary as well as Germany against her. Also, if Poland were neutral or friendly, Germany and the Western Powers of Europe would have found it much harder to whip up

<sup>1</sup> Sir Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin.

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an anti-Bolshevik crusade against the Czechs and the Russians. President Beneš (it is said) decided to resign on September 22nd, after the capitulation; everything was prepared, and then he put off his departure. He put it off because there seemed to be a chance of a settlement with Poland. Before September 21st there had been no chance of settling the question of Těšín by a territorial transfer, because once the principle of a change of frontiers was admitted in favour of Poland, Czechoslovakia would have been powerless against extreme German claims. After September 21st a friendly settlement with Poland was just possible. President Beneš tried. He failed. The reason why he failed is said to have been that already, behind his back, Dr. Hodža, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, had promised Poland the moon. Or it may have been simply that by leaving the Czechs in the lurch Great Britain and France gave Poland the chance to seize what she wanted without giving the Czechs anything in return. But at least it is already clear that the British Government did try to interfere with the efforts the Czechs were making to win the friendship of Poland: the Czechs "must abandon all political manœuvres". The motives of this British intervention are not yet clear. Perhaps on September 27th the British Government really thought it might have to fight a war on Czechoslovakia's side and wanted to prevent Poland from fighting on the other side, but in that case, why this peremptory pressure? The Czechs were already doing all they could; the "conversations with Poland about the cession of the territory with a Polish majority" were already being arranged. Was, then, the aim of the British intervention to keep the Czechs dependent on

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Great Britain and France? Here is a pretty problem for future historians.

On the morning of the 28th, Mr. Troutbeck, of the British Legation, saw Dr. Čermák of the Foreign office. He gave him the English translation of the letter sent by Hitler to Chamberlain on September 27th, and an official telegram relating to Chamberlain's broadcast. Also, "he stated that he, Mr. Newton, advised us to reply very quickly to the British time-table, because the House of Commons was meeting again in the afternoon".

The Czechoslovak reply to the British "time-table" was not delayed. It was sent on the same day, September 28th. In it the Czechoslovak Government agrees that the British and French Governments should guarantee the fulfilment of the Franco-British plan. The Czechoslovak Government "accepted in principle the plan and the time-table" but objects that "in certain points the time-table does not agree with the Franco-British proposals". The Czechoslovak Government "would accept any date for the definitive evacuation if all the conditions were fulfilled"—that is, if the work of both the proposed Commissions were done and the guarantees given. This date, it suggests, should be not before October 30th but not after December 15th. But it "requests with emphasis" that before the work of the Commissions is begun, it should be settled through diplomatic channels upon what principles and material factors the new frontier is to be based; for while the Franco-British plan had said that the areas with more than 50 per cent of Germans must be ceded, both the plan and the time-table had suggested modifications which would take into account geographical and economic facts. The Czechoslovak

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Government proposes that a French member be added to the Commission and that questions on which agreement cannot be reached be submitted to a representative of the United States for arbitration. It rejects again the plebiscites suggested in the Godesberg Memorandum. Above all,

Czechoslovakia cannot evacuate her territory, nor demobilise, nor leave her fortifications, before the future frontier shall have been precisely delimited and before the new system of guarantees which have been promised to Czechoslovakia in the Franco-British proposals shall have been established and assured.

Lastly, the Czechoslovak Government "emphasises that it would accept the submission of any difference whatever to His Excellency Franklin Roosevelt", or, "as the President of the United States himself proposes", to an international conference called "in the sense of the Note addressed on September 27th [sic] by the Czechoslovak Minister Masaryk to Lord Halifax".<sup>1</sup>

So, right up to the end of the days of suspense, the Czechoslovak Government was trying, as its duty was, to save something from the wreck which the ultimatum and capitulation of September 21st had made. Almost certainly this was hopeless. But the fact remains that the Czechs were betrayed yet again. Here, translated back into English from the Czechoslovak Foreign Office version, is an "English Communication concerning the projected Conference of Munich":

The observations of the Czechoslovak Government upon the proposed time-table have been communicated to the Prime Minister, who naturally

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

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will keep well in sight these points to which the Czechoslovak Government attaches importance.

Mr. Chamberlain has already assured His Excellency the President that he will fully keep in mind at Munich the interests of Czechoslovakia, and that he leaves for Munich with the intention of trying to find accommodation between the points of view of the German and Czechoslovak Governments so that it may be possible to take measures for the orderly and just application of the principle of the cession of territory to which the Czechoslovak Government has already given its consent.

His Majesty's Government desires to give expression to its firm hope that the Czechoslovak Government will not render more difficult the already so heavy task of the Prime Minister by formulating objections against the so-called time-table and insisting on them. The Czechoslovak Government must bear in mind, like all the others concerned, the grave alternative to success during the search for a new arrangement.

It is absolutely necessary that the negotiations of Munich should obtain quick and concrete results, which might lead to direct negotiations between Germany and Czechoslovakia. This can be obtained only if the Czechoslovak Government resolves at this stage in the negotiations to give to Mr. Chamberlain a wide discretion and not to bind him by making absolute conditions.

September 29, 1938  
Transcribed into Czech  
at 21 o'clock<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Czech version quotes in English the phrases: "the grave alternative to success" and "a wide discretion".

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This document, like many others, has not been made public, yet it is clearly material to any serious judgment of September's grave decisions.

There is no evidence that the Czechoslovak Government ever gave to Mr. Chamberlain "a wide discretion"; the plain fact is that he took it. There is no evidence that Czechoslovakia ever accepted the Franco-British plan unconditionally—on the contrary, the Czechoslovak Government did its plain duty by insisting again and again that the Czech defences must remain intact until the new frontiers were fixed and the Powers had given the promised guarantee. Who will say, especially after what happened at Godesberg, that these conditions were unreasonable, a selfish preference of Czechoslovak interests to the peace of the world? The hard facts are that the Czechs surrendered on conditions, and that Great Britain and France broke these conditions.

\* \* \*

To the House of Commons on September 28th Mr. Chamberlain said:

"His Majesty's Minister in Prague was instructed on the 22nd of September to inform Dr. Beneš that His Majesty's Government were profoundly conscious of the immense sacrifice to which the Czechoslovak Government had agreed, and the great public spirit they had shown. . . . The Czechoslovak Government's readiness to go to such extreme limits of concession had assured her of a measure of sympathy which nothing else could have aroused."

Much good did this bring to Czechoslovakia.

## *Chapter IX*

### BY FORCE AND WITHOUT WAR

“**I** FEEL certain that you can get all essentials without war and without delay.” Those were the frank words that Mr. Chamberlain wrote to Hitler on the eve of the Munich conference. It is doubtful whether in the whole of modern history one partner to a conference has given away so openly in advance all that another partner could wish to grab—but then it was not his to give.

Hysterical relief in London and Paris, sickening misgiving in Prague, greeted the news that there was to be a four-power conference in Munich on September 29th. Almost every Czech saw what it meant: Great Britain and France would buy a respite from war at Czechoslovakia’s expense; Hitler, after committing his whole personal prestige to ultimatum after ultimatum, could clearly not consent to a conference unless he were sure in advance that he would get “all essentials without delay”.

Czechoslovakia was not to be represented at the Conference. Even in his last letter to Hitler, Chamberlain had proposed “to discuss arrangements for transfer with you and representatives of the Czech Government, together with representatives of France and Italy if you desire”, but he did not insist that a Czech delegate should be heard, and nobody in the House of Commons raised the question. “The Czech Minister,

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Mr. Masaryk, did inquire. He telephoned the Prime Minister late in the day, and then sent him a letter. The Prime Minister's decision was not made public.<sup>1</sup> After the Conference had opened<sup>2</sup> the Czechoslovak Government was told that it might send "observers". These were destined not to take part in the discussions, but to "receive and pass on the decisions of the Conference".<sup>3</sup>

M. Mastný, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin, and Dr. Masařík of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office, were the observers. Dr. Masařík's report describes their experience:

Our aeroplane took off from Ruzyně at 15 o'clock [on September 29th]. After 80 minutes we arrived in Munich. The reception given us at the aerodrome made an extremely police-like impression. In a police car, accompanied by members of the Gestapo, we were brought to the Regina Palace Hotel, where the English delegation also had put up. Since the Conference had already entered upon its labours, it proved difficult to come into contact with the leading members of the French or English delegations. None the less I called by telephone out of the Conference first Rochat, then Gwatkin. The latter told me he would at once speak with me in the hotel.

At 19 o'clock I had my first conversation with him in the hotel. Gwatkin was very disturbed and very taciturn. From his extremely hesitant indica-

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *When there is no Peace*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Frederick T. Birchall in the *New York Times*, quoted by Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *ibid.*

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cations I concluded that a plan, whose details Gwatkin could not for the moment communicate to me, was already in its broad lines complete, and that this plan was much harsher than the Franco-British proposals. I pointed out to him on our red map our really vital interests. He showed a certain understanding as far as the question of the corridor was concerned, while he was not interested in the other questions. According to him, the Conference must finish at latest to-morrow, Saturday. Up to now the negotiations had been about no other question than that of Czechoslovakia. I drew his attention to the internal consequences such a plan would have in our country in the present situation—its economic and financial consequences. Gwatkin answered that I seemed to overlook how difficult the position of the Western Great Powers was and that I could not understand how difficult it had been to negotiate with Hitler. Gwatkin then went back to the Conference, after he had promised to have us called in at the first interval.

At about 22 o'clock Gwatkin took Minister Mastný and me to Sir Horace Wilson's room, where Sir Horace Wilson informed us, in the presence of Gwatkin and on Mr. Chamberlain's instructions, of the broad outline of the new plan, and gave us a map showing the districts which were to be at once occupied. *Instead of giving me an answer to my objections, he twice declared that he could not add anything to his explanation of the plan. He paid no attention to what we said about the places and districts that were important for us.*<sup>1</sup> Finally he went back to the Conference and we remained with Gwatkin alone.

<sup>1</sup> Our italics.

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Both of us explained again in detail the necessity of revising the plan. The most significant of his replies was addressed to Minister Mastný and asserted that the British delegation was favourable to the plan. As he began again about the difficulties that had revealed themselves in the negotiations with Hitler, I said to him that all depended on the firmness of the Western Great Powers. Gwatkin answered in a solemn tone: "*If you do not accept, you will have to settle your affairs with Germany quite alone.*<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the French will say this to you more nicely, but believe me, they share our view. . . . They are disinteresting themselves."

At half-past one in the morning we were led into the room where the Conference took place. Here were assembled Messrs. Neville Chamberlain, Daladier, Sir Horace Wilson, Léger, Gwatkin, Mastný and I. The atmosphere was oppressive: the judgment was about to fall. The French, visibly troubled, seemed to understand what this meant for French prestige. Chamberlain announced in a short introductory speech the agreement that was to be concluded, and handed to Minister Mastný the text of the agreement, which he read aloud to him. During the reading we asked for elucidations on certain points of the text. For instance, I asked Léger and Wilson kindly to explain to us the words "predominantly German character" in Article 4. Léger said nothing of the percentage, he said only that the majority would be a matter for discussion on the basis of the proposals we had accepted. Chamberlain, however, indicated that he expected only the carrying out of the proposals to which we had agreed.

<sup>1</sup> Our italics.

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During Article 6, I asked Léger if we could interpret it as a clause safeguarding our vital interests, as had been promised to us in their proposals. Léger answered: Yes, but only in a small degree, and the question fell within the competence of the International Commission. Minister Mastný asked Chamberlain if the Czechoslovak member of the Commission would have the same voting right as the other members, and Chamberlain promised this. On the question whether international or English troops would occupy the plebiscite zones, we were told that this was not yet fully settled and that they had in mind the participation of Belgian and Italian troops. While Minister Mastný conversed with Mr. Chamberlain about small details (*Chamberlain yawned continuously without bothering himself in the least*),<sup>1</sup> I asked Daladier and Léger if they expected any declaration or answer from our Government to the agreement. Daladier, visibly troubled, did not answer. *Léger, on the contrary, answered that the four statesmen had not much time. He added quickly that no further answer from our side was expected, that they regarded the plan as accepted,*<sup>2</sup> and that our Government was to send its plenipotentiary to Berlin the same day, by 17 o'clock at latest, to the sitting of the International Commission, lastly that the officer whom it was to send was to arrive in Berlin on Saturday in order to agree at once upon the details of the evacuation of the First Zone. The atmosphere began to be really heavy for all present; he spoke with us in a quite ruthless way, and this was a Frenchman, handing out this condemnation without right of appeal or possibility of modification.

<sup>1</sup> Our italics.

<sup>2</sup> Our italics.

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Chamberlain no longer hid his fatigue. After the reading of the text we were given a slightly corrected map. Then we took our leave and departed. The Czechoslovak Republic, as it was determined by the frontiers of 1918, had ceased to exist. . . . In the hall I had more talk with Rochat, who asked me about the possible internal repercussions—I answered shortly that I could not exclude the worst and that it should be reckoned with.

DR. HUBERT MASARIK

Munich, September 30th,  
4 in the morning

Comment is hardly necessary. This document, like many others we have quoted, speaks for itself and is harder to challenge than any comment could be.

Not many people slept in Prague on that night of September 29th to 30th. The front pages of the newspapers, censored almost blank, suggested already that the final perfidy was in progress. On the Friday morning, the 30th, M. Mastný and Dr. Masařík came back with the text of the Munich agreement and the new maps. Comment was useless. There was nothing to be done now except the heartrending, onerous and perilous work of breaking the news to the people and inducing the army to withdraw. The German Chargé d'Affaires had already, before the Czech "observers" returned, called on Dr. Krofta at 6.30 A.M. to discuss the decision. The Italian Chargé d'Affaires called later in the morning to offer the condolences of his Government. The Czechs received the Italian condolences not as one more insult, but as a sincere expression of Italian sympathy with Czechoslovakia for having had such an ally and such a friend. Last of all

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came Mr. Newton, with a message from Mr. Chamberlain saying that he expected to receive the Czech reply by noon. And at noon—

After deliberating and examining from all sides all the pressing recommendations which have been handed to the Government by the British and French Governments, and in full consciousness of its historical responsibility, the Czechoslovak Government, in complete agreement with the responsible factors in the political parties, has decided to accept the resolutions of the four Great Powers at Munich.

They have done this in the knowledge that the Nation would be preserved and that today no other decision is possible.

The Government of the Czechoslovak Republic at the same time, whilst taking this resolve, protests to the world against this decision, which was made one-sidedly and without its participation.

At five o'clock General Syrový spoke to the Czechoslovak people. "I am living through the worst moment of my life," he said. "I am carrying out the most painful task of my life, for it would have been easier to die." He went on:

"My highest aim is, as it is of every single one of you, to preserve the life of the nation. This duty we received from the hands of our forefathers, they who lived harder lives than we, for they were not free. And we must carry out this mission not only with loving hearts but with a clear understanding. In this fateful hour our duty is so: Weigh all, see all, and know clearly which way will lead us to this high

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aim. As a soldier, and in full consciousness of my responsibility, I declare: It is the way of peace. The way of peace, because we go into our new life with undiminished national strength, and with the knowledge that we shall build a State nationally closer knit, and therefore stronger.

“Before I said these words, I considered everything. During these days I have thought over the whole past of our battles and struggles and from them I have gained the belief that the way upon which I lead you is the only good and right way, for only this way leads to work, from which the new strength of our nation can grow.

“In Munich four European Great Powers have met together and agreed to summon us to accept the new frontiers which cut loose the German districts from our State. We had the choice between a desperate and hopeless struggle, the victims of which would be not only the ripened generation, but women and children too, and the acceptance of terms which, in their lack of consideration, and since they were imposed by force and without war, have no parallel in history. We wished to make our contribution to peace, and we would gladly have done so, but not in the form in which we were compelled to do it.

“However, we were deserted, and we stood alone. . . .

“We shall carry out the demands which were forced upon us. We ask our people, our nation to overcome its bitterness, its disappointment, its pain, and to help to assure the future inside our new frontiers. We are all on one ship, and each of us must help if we are to come safely into the haven of peace. . . . We rely on you—trust us.”

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General Syrový was followed by the Commander-in-Chief, General Krejčí, who read an order of the day to the army: "A true soldier must be able to bear failure. In that, too, there can be great and true heroism. Our army was not defeated, it has preserved its good name in the fullest measure. It must preserve it fully for better times. The Republic will need us again, and it will need our whole strength."

The moving voices ended—General Syrový's quiet, sober, gentle, General Krejčí's sharp, hard, unmusical with emotion. We sat there in the Hotel Alcron, English and American journalists, two men from the Czechoslovak Foreign Office. On the table lay the *Daily Telegraph* and the *News Chronicle*, rejoicing over the peace. Then from the wireless came the sound of the Czechoslovak National Anthem—first the plaintive, mournful "Kde Domov Můj" and then the confident "Hej Slováci", its confidence hollow at this moment. We stood up. The young American journalist by the window was crying quietly. Then we went out into the street.

Václavské Náměstí was leaden grey, under a leaden sky. A few knots of people were gathering together, and as we watched, a handful swung down the road together, yelling, "Down with the Government!" "Down with the capitulation!" But they were so pitifully, futilely few. Those who would have demonstrated, those who had saved the situation on September 21st, were gone, they were dispersed on the frontiers. We walked back to our hotel. Nobody spoke.

Then we wrote straight off and delivered a broadcast to England and to America. It represents faithfully what we and most English or American people who had stayed on in Prague felt at the time. It is not a recon-

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struction, but a record, and for this reason we quote it in full:

“You, English speaking listeners, are most of you rejoicing to-day. I am sure you are, for it seems as if the terrible black lowering threat of war, which appeared to be just upon you, has lifted again—at least for some months. Mothers cease to fear for the lives of their children. The flight from London has slowed down. The Stock Exchange has bounded up. When Mr. Chamberlain told the House that he was going to meet the dictators of Italy and Germany at Munich, members of Parliament shouted, ‘Thank God for the Prime Minister!’ And when the news of the bargain signed at Munich came out a joyful crowd mobbed Mrs. Chamberlain outside the Abbey. No wonder you are glad, for peace, even a few months of it, even a short respite from the bloodshed, the bereavement, the waste, the maiming, the hatred-mongering lies of war, especially of modern war, is a gain and a relief which no one can measure. And yet—will you please listen patiently and try to bear with what I am going to say? The news of your rejoicing makes ghoulish reading here in Prague. You have peace—a few months of it at least—but at a heavy price. And the price of your peace is being paid by others, at least the crushing first instalment of the price of your peace.

“I wish I could convey to you how much human suffering it is costing at this moment to buy your present relief from suffering. Imagine—these people, all classes of them, know quite clearly that they have lost their national independence. National

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independence! Two long and clumsy words, yet they express something for which you, like the people of Czechoslovakia, would most of you be willing to face even the horrors of war, from which you are at this moment so glad at being released. If your own country's shores or frontiers are actually threatened with invasion, and your cities with bombs, perhaps even—some of you—if one of your dominions or colonies is threatened, you will deliberately choose to fight rather than to submit; you will suddenly discover that there is something even worse than war, something worse even than modern war. That something, which causes human beings so much suffering that again and again throughout history they have preferred to it all the horrors of war—that is what you are now imposing on the Czechoslovak people in order that you may live a little longer in peace.

“Two things make the loss of independence even worse for the Czechoslovak people than it would be, for example, for English people. One is the history of the Czech nation. For many hundreds of years the Bohemian people lived here, within these very frontiers which are now to be so lightly changed. This was the first Protestant nation. Then, for three hundred years, it was under foreign domination, some of that time under frightful persecution. Last century, by a strange process, like that of a tree putting forth leaves again after a long winter, the Czechoslovak nation, with its language and its culture, revived. It gave birth to a fresh literature, to the magnificent music of Smetana and Dvořák—and finally to Thomas Masaryk, a man who, although he was the leader only of a small nation, was the

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greatest statesman of modern Europe, for he was utterly honest, skilful and farsighted, the true “philosopher king”. In the Great War the Czechoslovak people put into the field six whole divisions on our side—on *your* side—on the side of Great Britain and France, who now betray them. And so, in 1918, they became independent once more; and since then, for twenty years all but a few weeks, they have built up the Czechoslovak republic. Now they are losing, the people of Czechoslovakia, not only their independence, but an independence and a republic which is doubly theirs—for they themselves made it, they themselves built it up.

“The other thing that makes this disaster even worse for Czechoslovakia than it would be for you is this: that those who have inflicted it upon them were their trusted friends. They have not been defeated, they have been betrayed. How many, many times has Czechoslovakia received the most solemn assurances from France! How sincerely did Masaryk and Beneš base their policy on co-operation with Great Britain as well as with France, not simply out of self-interest—for in fact they had an alternative—but because they had an ideal in common with the western democracies. Mr. Chamberlain, leaving for Munich, quoted from Shakespeare; he should have quoted this passage, ‘Blow, blow thou winter wind, thou art not so unkind as man’s ingratitude’.

“Not only this fine people’s freedom, not only the whole system of collective security and international justice, but faith in human nature and in free peoples is wounded to death to-day. Think that over, and I believe you will come to agree.

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“But are you—I can’t see you, I don’t know you, but I imagine each of you as an ordinary, honest, honourable person—going to be content to remain forever in debt to the Czechoslovak people? Are you going always to live on their misery? *No*, you would be ashamed—as I am. Will you resolve to pay the debt one day? I will tell you how you can pay it. There are two things you can do. Write them down, so that you may never forget them. One is, you can promise now that, when the Czechoslovak people begin to suffer the things that have already happened in Austria this spring, you will do all you can to expose and to relieve their sufferings.

“The other is more important still. Please write it down. Write: ‘I promise that, if the peace bought by the Munich bargain is not permanent, I will, at the end of the next war, do all I can to see that the whole Czechoslovak people is restored to its full independence!’ ”

\* \* \*

From the Sudetenland, that Friday evening, the flight of Czechs, Jews, German Social Democrats and anti-Nazis had already begun. By Saturday morning thousands had reached the interior. What were they to do? Where were they to go? They could think only of getting away, of fleeing before they were put into concentration camps, or shipped to the Rhine frontier to work on fortifications, or beaten up by Henlein’s Ordners. The democratic statesmen in Munich had not very effectively considered the fate of these people, when they handed over the First Zone to Hitler at 2 P.M. on October 1st, Zone II the next day, Zone III the next. As the Czech police and

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soldiers left the frontiers, and before the German police and the *Reichswehr* arrived, Henlein's F.S. burst into the ceded districts, and Henlein with uncharacteristic candour had warned his opponents of their fate.

“We shall imprison them”, he said on September 30th on the German wireless, “*until they turn black.*” “These men”, he said again at Reichenberg, in his speech of triumph on October 8th, “have no right to pardon. I will give them none. I have decided to have them shut up.” Many who tried to escape could not; they had not time; they were not allowed into Czech territory, or they were told to stay for the proposed plebiscites—thousands were caught in the mouse-trap. But for them few people cared. They must rely on the International Commission; that is, in practice, they might stay and “turn black”.

## Chapter X

### FOUR-POWER JUSTICE

THE Treaty of Munich was a dream come true. The dream had been dreamt again and again, and told to the world with all the paraphernalia of prophecy, by *The Times* and the press of Nazi Germany. It was the dream of making peace treaties without war—that is, in less idealistic but more truthful language, the ideal of redrawing the map of the world and partitioning the smaller countries in accordance with the changing balance of forces and in answer to threats of war, without an actual clash between the full forces of the Great Powers. Changes in the map, it was argued, are inevitable, because the relative strengths of different nations are always changing, but why should these changes in the map always be made at the expense of war between the Great Powers? Why not make the changes by agreement in good time, and so cut out the war? Would not that be pure gain? And—it was added—would not these warless peace treaties be also far less unjust and harsh than the treaties that are made at the end of a war? For the peace that ends a modern war is made by victors who are vindictive because of their sufferings and the hopes and hatreds they have propagated to keep up their people's morale; but a warless transition from peace to peace would be made in an atmosphere of calm. Such was, and is, the theory.

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At Munich it was put into practice. *The Times* and the dictatorships had their way. The Munich Agreement was the perfect experiment in the revision of frontiers without open hostilities between Great Powers. It showed, once and for all, that what was called the peaceful revision of treaties is really the partition and enslavement of small countries in answer to the threats of those great ones which are unscrupulous enough to risk modern war; it showed also that the peace so gained is neither just nor stable. For what do we see? Was this agreement of Munich concluded in a calm atmosphere of unhurried wisdom? Far from it. It was drawn up and signed in a few hours, hastily—as M. Daladier explained with emphasis to the French Parliament<sup>1</sup>—under the threat, whether real or apparent, of an imminent aggression; and it was sprung on the peoples of the Western democracies as a *fait accompli*. The treaty, in fact, was concocted and signed in a hurry and in secret, under pressure of military threats; it was presented as a *fait accompli* to the peoples at a moment when a wave of fear swept the world, and the victim had no chance of appeal. This was the only way by which the peoples and parliaments of the still free nations could be induced to accept a treaty so wholly unjust, so utterly unjustifiable economically, strategically, or on a basis of self-determination.

On all these three grounds the Treaty of Versailles, though made by nations nearly maddened by suffering,

<sup>1</sup> Speech before the Chamber and the Senate, October 4th, 1938. “*Nous n'avions plus que quelques heures devant nous. . . . Il ne s'agissait pas de faire de la procédure, ou de formuler des contre-propositions. Il s'agissait de sauver la paix que d'aucuns avaient déjà pu croire définitivement détruite. J'ai dit ‘oui’ et je ne regrette rien. J'eusse préféré que toutes les puissances intéressées fussent présentes. Mais il fallait faire très vite. . . .*”

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was a miracle of wisdom and justice compared with this Treaty of Munich.

Here is a summary of the Munich terms. Czech troops were to begin leaving the Sudetenland on October 1st and to continue in four swift stages, the fourth zone to be occupied by the Germans on October 7th; meanwhile an international commission composed of representatives of Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain and Czechoslovakia was to lay down the "conditions governing evacuation" and to delimit "forthwith" a fifth zone to contain "the remaining territory of preponderantly German character", so that this, too, might be taken over by German troops on October 10th. The Czechoslovak Government was to be held responsible for any damage to "existing installations", an ambiguous and elastic term. The final delimitation of the frontier was a matter for the International Commission. In certain "exceptional cases" the Commission might recommend to "the four Powers, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy" (not, of course, Czechoslovakia), "minor modifications in the strictly ethnographical determination of the zones which are to be transferred without plebiscite". After the five zones had been occupied, the Commission was to determine the territories in which a plebiscite should be held. The plebiscite must take place by the end of November, and the plebiscite areas would be occupied by "international bodies" until the completion of the victory. There was to be a right of option into and out of the transferred territories, to be exercised within six months from the date of the agreement, a German-Czechoslovak commission being left to "consider ways of facilitating the transfer of population and settle questions of principle". And within four weeks the

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Czechoslovak Government must release from the army or police force any Sudeten Germans who wished to be released, and to set free any Sudeten Germans imprisoned for political offences. In return, Germany gave no guarantee that the Czechs in prison in the Reich, or in the hands of the Gestapo, would be freed.

The Prime Minister and his colleagues in the House of Commons, M. Daladier before the Chamber, made great play with the differences between Munich and Godesberg, and with the powers of the International Commission, that fig-leaf. Munich, Mr. Chamberlain declared, was a reversion to the Anglo-French plan, an "orderly instead of a violent method of carrying out an agreed decision". "*Victoire humaine également*", said M. Daladier, "*puisque l'accord de Munich, grâce à des concessions réciproques et à la bonne volonté de tous, est en progrès certain sur le mémorandum de Godesberg. Il contient des stipulations organisant pour les individus le droit d'option, il élimine toutes les dispositions qui eussent pu figurer dans l'armistice qu'un vainqueur impose à un vaincu.*"<sup>1</sup> Mr. Chamberlain<sup>2</sup> explained his claim by saying that Munich provided for German military occupation in "five clearly defined stages" the line "up to which German troops will enter into occupation" would now be a line fixed by the International Commission on which "both Germany and Czechoslovakia are represented". M. Daladier explained that "*une commission internationale a été créée en vue d'éviter l'arbitraire de décisions unilatérales. Aux solutions de force, on peut espérer ainsi substituer les pratiques du droit.*" Under the Munich Agreement, said Mr. Chamberlain, all

<sup>1</sup> For the full text of M. Daladier's speech see "La Bataille pour la Paix", published by *Le Temps*, Paris, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> For Mr. Chamberlain's speech see Hansard, October 3rd, 1938, cols. 40-50.

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plebiscite areas were to be defined by the International Commission; its criterion was to be "the predominantly German character of the area", the interpretation of this phrase being left to the Commission. "I am bound to say", he added, "that the German [Godesberg] line did take in a number of areas which could not be called predominantly German in character." The conditions of evacuation, which under the Godesberg Memorandum were to be settled by Germans and Czechs alone, "an arrangement that did not give the Czechs much chance of making their voices heard", were also to be "laid down in detail by the International Commission".

How Mr. Chamberlain reconciled his remark that a German-Czechoslovak Commission "did not give the Czechs much chance of making their voices heard" with clause 7 of the Munich Agreement, by which a German-Czechoslovak Commission should "determine the details of the option, consider ways of facilitating the transfer of population and settle questions of principle arising out of the said transfer" he did not explain. And what, in the light of this same remark, are we to think of the threat which Mr. Ashton Gwatkin made to the Czech observers at Munich: "If you do not accept you will have to settle your affairs alone with Germany"?

Yet again and again, whenever a question was asked about the fate of the non-Nazi Germans in the Sudetenland, about their right of option, about the use of the 1910 census figures, about the seizure of wholly Czech villages by Germany, the reply came pat: "That is a matter for the International Commission". The phrase runs like a refrain through the parliamentary debates of the last five months: "That is a matter for the International Commission". "The Munich agree-

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ment", said the British Prime Minister, "is no longer an ultimatum, but it is a method which is carried out largely under the supervision of an international body." Sir Samuel Hoare<sup>1</sup> took up the same theme: "I say that in the circumstances it was a great credit to the two Prime Ministers that they were able to substitute for unlimited and uncontrolled military invasion, a limited and controlled cession of territory under the supervision of an international body". The magic phrase "an international body" served its purpose; it lulled the scruples of many people who still clung to the principles that had given rise to the League of Nations.

What, in fact, was this International Commission set up at Munich? Baron von Weiszäcker of the German Foreign Office, the British, French and Italian Ambassadors in Berlin, and Dr. Mastný, the Czechoslovak Minister. When he heard of its composition a Czech Foreign Office official said to us bitterly, "And our only friend will be von Weiszäcker". He was wrong. The Czechs had no friend. Or, rather, they had as before, two false friends. For what actually happened? The Commission met in Berlin on October 5th and 6th. The Germans presented monstrous demands. The British representatives then met the Czechs, agreed with them that the German demands were monstrous, urged them to resist and promised to support them. The Commission sat again, the Czech protest was made, and the British spoke on the Czech side. The Commission adjourned for a short while. When it met again the German delegate turned to the Czech, and said, "Well, what would you like done?" The Czech delegate replied that he would like a vote

<sup>1</sup> On October 3rd, 1938.

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to be taken. The German said, "By all means, if you think it is worth while", and as he said it he showed a paper in which the proposed frontier—the Fifth Zone—was given; and there, at the bottom, were the signatures of the British and the French delegates. The Czechoslovak Government protested by telegram to Mr. Chamberlain, but in vain. Mr. Ashton Gwatkin had threatened the Czechs at Munich, "If you do not accept you will have to settle your affairs alone with Germany". That is exactly what the British and French governments in fact left the Czechs to do. Great Britain and France used this threat to force a new surrender from the Czechoslovak Government. Having compelled the surrender, they were bound to protect the Czechs against the fate they had threatened. This obligation also they dishonoured.

The Czechoslovak Government might have known, the French and British peoples should have known, and the British and French Prime Ministers must have known, that this would happen—that the International Commission would be a fraud. For France and England, having accepted the terms of Munich because they refused to face the risk of war, were hardly likely to face that risk at this stage in order to defend a Czechoslovakia they had just made impossible to defend by forcing her to give up her natural and fortified frontiers. But this is exactly what President Beneš *did* know, and foresee, and try to prevent. The Czechs had always attached conditions to their acceptance of the Anglo-French plan. They had done so on September 21st, on September 25th, on the 26th, and on the 28th.<sup>1</sup> They surrendered on definite terms; Great Britain and France took their surrender and then

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapters IV and VIII.

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broke the conditions upon which it was made. The essential infamy of Munich—the thing that made it simply a disguised Godesberg—was this: it forced the Czechs to give up their defences with all the military secrets they contained, before the new frontiers were fixed and guaranteed. By doing this, the agreement put the Czechs wholly at the mercy of the Germans, and so was directly responsible for their enslavement and for the persecution of the non-Nazis in the Sudetenland.

The Treaty of Munich and the “zones” are indivisible, and it is a fallacy to judge Munich by its bare terms, apart from the Fifth Zone and the Sixth. Mr. Chamberlain on October 3rd went so far as to declare that “on the difference between those two documents [Godesberg and Munich] will depend the judgment as to whether we were successful in what we set out to do, namely, to find an orderly instead of a violent method of carrying out an agreed decision”. But what, in fact, were the differences? They were differences for the worse.

The British Prime Minister claimed that Munich provided for the German occupation not “in one operation by 1st October”, but “in five clearly defined stages between 1st October and 10th October”. The timing of the occupation was a vital factor, not only because if Hitler were allowed to sweep in with a rush he would have the whole country at his mercy before the new frontiers were fixed, but also because, in the words of the Czechoslovak letter of September 25th<sup>1</sup>—words quoted with apparent approval by Mr. Chamberlain himself in the letter he sent to Hitler on the 26th—“The whole process of moving the population” would

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter VIII, p. 111.

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be "reduced to panic flight on the part of those who will not accept the German Nazi régime". The terms of Munich did not prevent either of these things from happening. The "five stages" were, if anything, a concession to Hitler rather than to the Czechs, for they made the German occupation easier, and it could hardly have been quicker. "There are five stages," said Mr. Duff Cooper,<sup>1</sup> "but those stages are almost as rapid as an army can move."

And the new frontiers themselves? In his denunciation of the frontier demanded at Godesberg, Mr. Chamberlain declared that it took in "a number of areas which could not be called predominantly German in character". But what did the Berlin commission do? It even "improved" upon the Godesberg line. The Fifth Zone decision, announced on October 6th, handed over to Germany not isolated communes but whole districts either purely Czech, or containing a Czech majority. Here are some instances. Polička, a town with forty times as many Czechs as Germans, was handed over to Germany—because it contained a powder factory. In the Litomyšl district the Reich annexed Pohodlí, Benátky, Nová Ves and Pazucha, with 1436 Czechs and 257 Germans; in the Ustí nad Orlicí district they took Rviště, Dobrá Voda, Řečky and Oldřichov, with 1092 Czechs and 189 Germans, and in the Dvůr Králové district two communes with 286 Czechs and one German! To bring the frontier as close as possible to Plzeň (Pilsen) with its Škoda armaments factory, the Germans were allowed to swallow up the communes of Litice, Dobřany, Robčice and Lhota—villages which had had Czech majorities as far back as 1910 and in 1938 formed a compact area

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, October 3rd, 1938, col. 37.

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with 5982 Czechs and 3773 Germans. Břeclav, with its vital railway junction, where the lines from Vienna and Bratislava meet those from Prague, Poland and Silesia, was handed over to Germany with the whole of its surrounding iron-working district—a district containing 18,120 Czechs and 1808 Germans. Vítkovice, with the second greatest steel-works in the Republic, was not given to the Germans. It was only three-quarters surrounded, although this meant putting inside Germany Svinov, with 4319 Czechs and less than 800 Germans—but then Svinov had the transmitters for the Moravská Ostrava broadcasting station. In the Zábřeh and Šumperk district, Germany received seventy-three communes, with 53,534 Czechs and less than 30,000 Germans. Czechoslovakia's already dangerously narrow “waist” was tightened still further by the German annexation of the district of Moravský Krumlov, in Southern Moravia—a district with 3047 Czechs and 349 Germans. Even the Godesberg line had not taken in Moravský Krumlov. And at Bratislava Germany took the suburb of Petržalka<sup>1</sup>—why? Because it contained the Danube bridgehead and the transmitters of the Bratislava wireless station.

So the Berlin Commission—that “international body” to which Mr. Chamberlain gave his blessing and handed over the Czechs—delivered up to the Third Reich in the name of the self-determination of peoples 719,000 Czechs, not, as Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons on November 1st, 1938, “something like 580,000”.<sup>2</sup> In order to liberate 2,806,000 Germans, less than one-twenty-fifth of the people of

<sup>1</sup> Petržalka was Hungarian before 1918.

<sup>2</sup> On what this figure was based we cannot discover. Mr. Chamberlain gave it almost a month after the Fifth Zone was fixed, and so when all the facts were known. Yet it is a large error.

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Germany, the Treaty of Munich and its International Commission placed in the land of concentration camps nearly a tenth of all the Czechs in Czechoslovakia and at least 300,000 anti-Nazi Germans and Jews. It deprived the remaining six and a half million Czechs of nearly all effective independence. At the same time it left within the mutilated republic 250,000 Germans, whom Germany began at once to use to blackmail the Czechoslovak Government and to impair the little that remained of Czech liberty. If the bargain of Munich really averted an imminent war, perhaps the enslavement of the Czechs and the persecution of many thousands of Sudeten Germans and Jews may be held a price well worth paying for this; but for heaven's sake do not let us pretend that it was "self-determination" or "change without violence".

That there should still have been a quarter of a million Germans left in Czechoslovakia, after a partition in which Germany had been given the benefit of every doubt, brings out very clearly the truth, which the critics of the Versailles settlement and the advocates of a "homogeneous" Czechoslovakia should have known all along, that it is quite impossible to draw a frontier answering to the distribution of races in a district where races are mixed. Strangely enough, nothing had happened since the Treaty of Versailles to make a problem which was baffling in 1919 simple in 1938.

On what principle were the new frontiers—those of the Fifth Zone—supposedly based? First on the ethnographical principle, but this according to long-out-of-date figures that had always been false. The Germans, refusing to accept the Czechoslovak census of 1930, insisted that the Austro-Hungarian census of

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1910 be taken as the true criterion of how many Germans and how many Czechs there were in each district. The International Commission gave them their way. It was a monstrous demand and a monstrous decision, for the census of pre-war Austria had been hopelessly rigged against the Czechs. In the census of 1910 the nationality of each person was counted by the *Umgangssprache*, that is, not by the mother tongue, but by the language of everyday use. The Czech miner in Northern Bohemia, who was compelled to speak German with his employers, and who in any case would lose his job if he registered as Czech; the small Czech official, who had to use German because it was the State language; the Czech shopkeeper, who spoke German with his customers—all these people were registered as Germans. All Jews were registered as Germans. And Mr. Wickham Steed, in a letter to *The Times*, has described how he, an English journalist, figured in the census as a Viennese German. He had, of course, declared himself British, but a census official came to call on him to ask him what was his *Umgangssprache*—what language did he use in his daily work? Mr. Steed replied that he used German. “*Also Deutsch*” (Therefore German), said the official, and Mr. Steed was carefully entered on the list as a German. The census of 1910 was faked; it was also out of date. The population in the Sudetenland had become steadily more Czech in the twenty-eight years since 1910 and especially in the twenty years since the foundation of the Republic in 1918. Apart from the inevitable increase of Czech officials after the war, many Sudeten Germans had left the country for Austria; Czech labour had in many places replaced German labour; Czech peasants had settled in the land which had belonged

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to German feudal landlords until the Czechoslovak land reform. For instance, in the eleven years between 1910 and 1921 (the date of the first Czechoslovak census) alone, the Czech population in Brüx (Most) increased from 278 to 465 per thousand inhabitants; in Teplitz-Schönau (Teplice-Šanov) from 129 to 227 per thousand; in Aussig (Ústí n/Labem) from 54 to 166 per thousand, and in Komotau (Chomutov) from 18 to 72 per thousand. And in Znojmo, in Southern Moravia, where by the 1910 census there were 13 per cent of Czechs, by the 1930 census there were 52 per cent. Why, as the Czechs bitterly asked, should a census made after three centuries of Austrian rule be considered fairer or more reliable than a census made after twelve years of Czech rule? <sup>1</sup>

But unjust and unfavourable to the Czechs as the 1910 census was, it was not unjust or unfair enough for Germany's needs: the Reich received 215 communes which had a Czech majority even in 1910. Břeclav, with its four adjoining villages, had had in 1910, 11,186 Czechs and only 6421 Germans; nine villages around Lanškroun had been Czech for centuries; and in the Hranice district in Moravia Germany annexed seven villages (Spálov, Luboměř, Heltinov, Jindřichov, Partutovice, Střítež and Vysoká) which

<sup>1</sup> One argument which the Germans used for taking the census of 1910 as the basis for the new frontiers is a historical curiosity. The Munich Agreement, in its fifth paragraph, cited "the conditions of the Saar plebiscite" as the basis of the conditions on which the proposed plebiscites in Czechoslovakia were to be held. The German delegate claimed that not only the proposed plebiscites but all ethnographical questions in dispute—even those that were specifically covered by articles in the Munich Agreement which said nothing about the Saar—be settled on the analogy of the Saar. As the Saar plebiscite used a voters' list at the time of the signature of the Treaty of Versailles, and as there were for the Sudetenland no figures referring to this date, the Germans demanded that the Austro-Hungarian figures of 1910 be taken as the basis for drawing the frontiers.

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according to the 1910 figures were purely Czech, with 4027 Czechs and 115 Germans—thirty-five times as many Czechs as Germans. How was the Berlin Commission, with its British and French representatives, persuaded so flagrantly to violate self-determination in the name of self-determination? The only reason that has been given is that the Germans pointed out that in various parts of Czechoslovakia there were still islands of territory—Jihlava (Iglau), for example—inhabited largely by Germans, and it was as compensation for these islands that they demanded territories purely or almost purely Czech, a cession unjustifiable even by the cooked figures of 1910. Thus the Commission of Berlin put the clock back 123 years. For the first time for over a century human beings in Europe were bartered about like cattle and taken as “compensation”—something which Europe had not seen since the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Mr. Chamberlain’s “international body” had proved wholly useless as a guarantee of justice for Czechoslovakia, and as the French weekly *L'Europe Nouvelle* wrote on October 15th, 1938, “*Mieux eût valu peut-être qu'aucune commission d'ambassadeurs ne vint décorer cette brutale conquête des attributs apparents de la justice ou de l'équité*”.

But even the Fifth Zone was not the end. On November 20th Czechoslovakia signed a bilateral agreement with Germany, an agreement where Czechoslovakia could only gratefully accept the German demands, ceding a Sixth Zone to the Reich for “reasons of traffic policy”.<sup>1</sup> The International Commission did nothing but take note of this agreement

<sup>1</sup> This euphemistic phrase was applied to it by the *Prager Presse*, the official Czech Government organ.

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and declare the frontier final. Czechoslovakia was handed back 27 villages and Germany took 73 more, with 40,000 people of whom 29,000 were Czechs—Czechs whose forefathers had lived there for centuries. All the territory ceded to Germany made the Reich's road and rail communications easier; Czechoslovakia had yet another strip of railway (from Plzeň south-east into the Bohemian forest) cut, but this was of no account to anybody. In the Břeclav district Germany took all the forests of the Lichtenstein estates, forests which were a great loss to the impoverished Republic; on the Slovak bank of the Danube she took Děvín, a strategic stronghold dominating the confluence of the Danube and the March, as well as the southern outlet of the projected Danube-Oder canal. (The Germans began at once to fortify it.) And—a detail—Germany received 3750 hectares of forest land around Domažlice, in the Bohemian forest, with a population that had been Czech for hundreds of years. This land had been part of the estates of the Countess Schönborn and had been split up by the Czech agrarian reform after the war. Now that lucky lady, who had fled to Munich early in September, received her Czech villages back.

On the same day, November 20th, by a second “bilateral agreement” Czechoslovakia gave to Germany the right to build a new *autostrada*, a great motor road cutting clean through Moravia to connect Breslau with Vienna. The road was to be extraterritorial German property, a German corridor across a nominally sovereign State, crossing Czech soil for 65 kilometres, built by German and Czech labour jointly, but by a German company. Germany would police the road inside Czechoslovakia as well as outside; Germany was

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to have judicial sovereignty over it, and German citizens might use it without passports. Germany would, also, at any rate ostensibly, pay for the road.<sup>1</sup> The great "Moravian Gate" was wide open for a German drive to the east, and Germany had now complete control of the outlets to Central Europe, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean.

A third "bilateral agreement" regulated the building of the Danube-Oder Canal, to be built and administered by Germany and Czechoslovakia, each country bearing the cost of its own stretch of the canal. With the German scheme for canalising the Upper Elbe and joining it to the valley of the March, it would give the Reich complete control of the main waterways between the Baltic, the North Sea and the Black Sea. Though it could bring no special benefits to Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia would have to pay for it. On the three "agreements" General Göring's newspaper commented gleefully:

It is worthy of note that these far-reaching agreements, which at last bring the normalisation of the relations between Czechoslovakia and Germany, were concluded without the interference of the International Commission. . . . It was soon apparent that the work of the International Commission had become superfluous, since Berlin and Prague met for direct negotiations which are distinguished by a common will for collaboration.<sup>2</sup>

So much for the International Commission. That farce had served. The French and British Govern-

<sup>1</sup> It now appears, however (February, 1939), that Germany has demanded that Czechoslovakia should pay 30,000,000 crowns towards the cost.

<sup>2</sup> *Essener National Zeitung*, November 22nd, 1938.

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ments now scarcely bothered to pretend that they had not first deprived the Czechs of all means of defence, then left them to settle their affairs alone with Germany.

But if Germany received the lion's share of the Munich booty, Poland and Hungary, the jackals, had also to be satisfied. That, too, was provided for in the Munich Agreement, where Italy and Germany "for their part" declared themselves ready to "give a guarantee" to Czechoslovakia "when the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled". Poland arrived on the scene first, for as Colonel Beck explained, "*Nous vivons à une époque où il faut savoir affirmer ses intérêts d'une façon particulièrement courageuse*". A Polish Note, sent to Prague on September 30th and couched in arrogant and hostile language, demanded the immediate cession of the districts of Těšín, Bohumín-Fryštát and Jablunkov, as well as the Karvinná mining basin. (The Poles also demanded a plebiscite in the Czech districts of Slezská Ostrava and Frýdek.) Next day Czechoslovakia agreed to give up Těšín, Fryštát, Jablunkov and Karvinná, and the Polish army scrambled into its new territory, terrified lest the Germans should get there first.<sup>1</sup> The Czechs lost the vital railway junction of Bohumín (a town with an infinitesimal Polish minority)—so that their only east-to-west railway between Prague and Slovakia or Ruthenia was cut once more—and they lost their best mines of hard coal. But what could they do but accept the Polish terms? The

<sup>1</sup> "Tout cela avec une mise en scène théâtrale," commented *L'Europe Nouvelle*, bitterly. "L'armée polonaise s'est ébranlée sur l'ordre de: 'En avant, marche!' crié par le maréchal Smigly Rydz et répété dans tous les lieux par des haut-parleurs. Voilà à quoi servent les armes fournies par la France en vertu de l'accord de Rambouillet de septembre 1936."

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Treaty of Munich had left Czechoslovakia no power even to bargain, let alone to resist. In November, 1938, Poland seized still more territory in Moravian-Silesia and in Northern Slovakia, including the railway junction of Čadca, and her final booty was 972 square kilometres of territory, with 132,000 Czechs and Slovaks, 20,000 Germans and 77,000 Poles. Self-determination of the 1938 model had handed over another complex of minorities to the country that had already the largest, and the worst-treated population of minorities in Europe.

With Hungary, Czechoslovakia was not even allowed to settle things alone. After some weeks of futile and angry negotiations between the new autonomous Slovak Government and the Hungarians, the two parties asked Germany and Italy to "arbitrate"—there was no longer even any mention of their two fellow-signatories of the Munich Agreement. The two dictators thus had a chance to show what they meant by that justice for which they had always cried out. They took once more the census of 1910 as the theoretical basis for the settlement. There was even less excuse for using this census in Slovakia than in Bohemia and Moravia, for the Magyar census of 1910 was even more faked than the Austrian. It, too, was based on the *Umgangssprache*, but in addition, it was taken when Hungary's policy of Magyarisation had reached its high-water mark, so that almost every member of a subject nationality was persuaded, cajoled or dragooned into declaring himself a Magyar. "To be just," wrote the *Central European Observer* on November 11th, "not the now dead souls of thirty years ago but those still living should have been taken into consideration." The German-Italian decision, given

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out in Vienna on November 2nd, 1938, handed over to Hungary 1,035,279 people, of whom two-thirds only were Magyars—289,392 were Czechs and Slovaks, 51,034 were Jews, and 127,814 Ruthenes. In Slovakia, towns with Slovak majorities, such as Košice, where according to the 1930 census there were 66 per cent of Slovaks and only 18 per cent of Magyars, or Lučenec, with 8725 Slovaks and 4007 Magyars, went to Hungary. Czechoslovakia was shut away from the Danube except at Bratislava, her roads and railways in Slovakia and Ruthenia were cut to pieces. As for Ruthenia, its fate was terrible. Cut off from its fertile southern plain, pushed back into its mountains and forests, deprived of its only two towns, Užhorod and Mukačevo—neither had a Hungarian majority, or anything like one—deprived of its administration, it was left the prey of its own poverty and of German imperialism.

Ruthenia at the end of the World War, after centuries of Hungarian rule, had been a country only to be compared in misery and confusion to the remote parts of the Turkish Empire or to the Papal States before the *Risorgimento*. The Czechs in twenty years raised it up from its misery, giving to its pitifully backward people schools, education, hospitals, co-operative societies, good and decent government. All that was over. Part of it must go back to Hungary, part of it must remain ostensibly independent and “autonomous”, really the base for Germany’s drive into the Ukraine, and therefore full of German agents and influence.

The Munich Agreement and the Anglo-French Plan had encouraged the Czechs to believe that once their new frontiers were settled, however unjust those frontiers might be, however painful the operation, they

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would receive a guarantee from England, France, Germany and Italy. The British and French Prime Ministers had both been at great pains to flourish this "international guarantee" at their political opponents. M. Daladier assured the Chamber:

*"Nous avons apporté à l'Etat Tchèque des assurances de garanties internationales. La France et la Grande-Bretagne s'engagent sans réserve ni délai à s'associer à une garantie internationale des nouvelles frontières de l'Etat Tchécoslovaque contre toute aggression non provoquée, l'Allemagne et l'Italie s'engageant d'autre part à donner leurs garanties dès que la question des minorités polonaise et hongroise en Tchécoslovaquie aura été réglée."*

"Without reservation or delay." And Mr. Chamberlain said:

"The joint guarantee which is given under the Munich Agreement to the Czechoslovak State by the governments of the United Kingdom and France against unprovoked aggression upon their boundaries, gives to the Czechs an essential counterpart which was not to be found in the Godesberg memorandum."

"An essential counterpart." And Sir Thomas Inskip, in the House of Commons on October 4th, went further:

"The House will realise that the formal Treaty of guarantee has yet to be drawn up and completed in the normal way, and, as the Foreign Secretary has stated in another place, there are some matters which must await settlement between the Governments concerned. Until that has been done, tech-

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nically the guarantee cannot be said to be in force. His Majesty's Government, however, feel under a moral obligation to Czechoslovakia to treat the guarantee as being now in force. In the event, therefore, of an act of unprovoked aggression against Czechoslovakia, His Majesty's Government would certainly feel bound to take all steps in their power to see that the integrity of Czechoslovakia is preserved."

What, in fact, happened? In the original Anglo-French proposals of September 19th the British Government "would be prepared, as a contribution to the pacification of Europe, to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression". This offer was already, by bad drafting or by intent, vague and misleading enough, but the Munich Agreement—which relegated the whole question of the guarantee to an "annex"—was even more vague and far more misleading.

The British and French Governments declared that "they stand by the offer . . . of the Anglo-French proposals . . . relating to an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against aggression". As for the Germans and Italians, "When the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled, Germany and Italy for their part will give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia". The French and British Governments could therefore shelter first behind the Polish and Hungarian minorities, then behind the fact that the proposed guarantee was joint and depended on Germany and Italy. Germany and Italy meanwhile had

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merely promised to give a "guarantee", time and extent wholly unspecified.

The French and British Governments, in short, when they extracted from the Czechs assent to the Anglo-French Plan and to the *Diktat* of Munich, promised in return to give a guarantee for the independence of the new Czechoslovakia—at least they seemed to ordinary people to be making this promise, and they used this semblance of a promise to impress most effectively their own and neutral public opinion. The Czechs had the right to expect that at least this promise would be kept. But no. Great Britain and France defrauded them of this too, the "essential counterpart" of their sacrifice. Already on November 1st Mr. Chamberlain was telling the House of Commons that the question of the guarantee could not be "cleared up" until the whole question of the minorities of Czechoslovakia had been settled. "What", he said, "the terms of that guarantee will be and who will be partakers in that guarantee is not a question on which I can give the House any information to-day." In any case, he added, Great Britain had never engaged to give a guarantee of the new frontiers, but only a guarantee against unprovoked aggression, which was "quite a different thing". It was, indeed. It is, of course, quite true that every mention made of a possible guarantee, whether in the Anglo-French Plan of September 19th, in the Munich Agreement, or in the speeches of Messrs. Chamberlain, Daladier and Inskip, has a loophole: Great Britain and France engage only to *associate* themselves in a *joint* guarantee. So it may be held that, in not at once guaranteeing independence to the new Czechoslovakia, Great Britain and France broke no promises. But that does not dispose of the

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question, Why did they introduce this loophole, and so studiously maintain it? If it was accidental, then there is no excuse for using it to escape an intended and deserved promise. If it was not accidental, what purpose can it have had except to deceive public opinion in their own countries and elsewhere? Perhaps their guarantee, if given, would have proved worthless; but the whole history of this proposed guarantee is an exceptionally pure example of fraud committed by Governments, and its consequences will be worth tracing.

As for the plebiscites, with which Mr. Chamberlain made great play, Germany at once "persuaded" Czechoslovakia to renounce them, and areas where plebiscites should have taken place were simply given to Germany at four days' notice as part of the Fifth Zone. What did this mean? Self-determination of peoples, if it can be applied, is not only just but sensible, since it must tend to reduce the causes of war. But self-determination is very hard to apply in practice; to apply it exactly is of vital moment in cases where it may mean transferring people to a country in which there is persecution; and the only way to apply self-determination exactly is to take a vote of the people concerned. Yet the history of Europe after the World War showed again and again that plebiscites themselves are a danger to peace and are not even just, since their results depend on intimidation. Perhaps then the Four Powers were right to abandon the plebiscites. But in that case it was wrong to use the idea of self-determination to prepare public opinion for the Anglo-French proposals and the Agreement of Munich. What is more, if plebiscites were impracticable, they should never have been proposed only to be abandoned, for this action

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cost many thousands of innocent people their liberty, some their lives. These people were told to stay in these districts to do their duty in the plebiscites. Suddenly they found the plebiscites cancelled and themselves trapped. Only a few had the time or the chance to escape.

But, it will be argued—as Sir John Simon argued in the House of Commons as late as February 13th, 1939—there is a clause in the Munich Agreement giving these people the right of option, the right to become Czechoslovak citizens within six months. Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax made capital of this clause in their speeches, though they did not say that the details of the option were to be decided not even by the International Commission, but by a German-Czechoslovak Commission. On November 20th Prague was “persuaded” into an agreement on the right of option. The right did not apply to Germans or to German Jews. They were left to Hitler and Henlein, for “regeneration” in Dachau or Oranienburg, or perhaps in one of those brand new concentration camps set up in the Sudetenland. How can a person in a concentration camp exercise a right of option? If a few managed to escape, how could the Czechs be expected to risk building up a new German minority, to risk the displeasure of the Reich by harbouring them, to find place for them in a country impoverished and already jammed with refugees? As for the Czechs of the Sudetenland—they, it is true, could opt for Czechoslovakia, they were not even compelled to do more than leave all their capital behind them. In short, the right of option also proved to be a swindle.

## *Chapter XI*

### PAYING FOR PEACE

THE Czech people after Munich had one hope left—that their army would refuse to obey its orders. How could the soldiers retire from their fortresses without firing a shot and not rebel? The Czech Army knew that it was the most up-to-date army in the world; it had always been ready to fight against overwhelming odds; it had always believed the German Army to be far from invincible. But hour after hour passed and no news came to Prague of rebellion at the front. What had happened?

Cut off in the field and scattered, not knowing the exact terms of the Munich Agreement or the full extent of the new betrayal and the new capitulation, always believing, as the order came to give up each zone, that this must be the last, that their Government could not have agreed to give up all their prepared defences, that they would keep at least some of the fortifications intact, the army was helpless, blinded, deceived. Many of its commanders thought seriously of revolt at the start, but for some unexplained reason a series of accidents prevented them from getting into touch with the commanders on their right or left flanks until it was too late. When at last they returned to Prague there were terrible scenes in the building of the General Staff, officers back from the front bitterly reproaching General Krejčí and other generals, not with the capitulation but with not

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having seized power and led a revolution. The men who made these reproaches were not dictatorial hotheads with communist sympathies. They were sober, intelligent, hard-working, realistic professional soldiers who had learnt from Masaryk to respect democracy.

What was this unfought defeat like for the Czech Army? We quote Captain Coulson, one of the British observers sent to the Sudetenland to see the Munich terms fulfilled. We quote him because nobody can accuse him of being biased against the Munich Agreement, for he begins his story by saying that September 29th had left him "as much relieved as anyone else in England". Captain Coulson and his fellow-observer (for the observers worked in pairs) had attached to them "an obviously good-natured, unsophisticated-looking, rather bucolic Czech colonel" whom they christened Stanislaus; and here is the account of their first meeting in a hotel in Prague:

At the beginning, Stanislaus held himself aloof, coldly and rigidly. Speaking rather poorer German than ourselves, he talked stiffly of his country's humiliation, and as he spoke his stiffness turned to angry bitterness. This grew . . . until it reached a point at which it was painful to us. He clapped his hand to his pocket and, stumbling in his speech through using an unfamiliar language, declared in a wild whisper that he would shoot as many Germans as he could and then himself before he allowed a yard of his country to be handed over to them. With that his anger was spent and he became apologetically silent. . . .

They first went to České Budějovice, a town in South Bohemia, and this is how they found it:

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The troops manning the barricades stared curiously and sullenly at us and our Union Jack as we crawled through the narrow openings and passed them. The great open space in the centre of the town, as large as Trafalgar Square, was packed with a vast crowd, wandering about in uneasy, restless silence. Troops were everywhere. The doors of the hotel in the square that we were making for were surrounded by refugees who were obviously very poor. . . .

The Czech troops had retreated from the frontier in order to avoid the danger of a clash with the German Army and occupied a line a few miles south of the town. Beyond that line, between the Czech troops and the frontier, there was chaos. It was a no-man's-land in which the Czech civil authorities and Sudeten Germans struggled for control. In some towns and villages the Czechs managed to maintain control. In others the Sudeten Germans, reinforced by armed units of Free-corps organised in Germany, had driven out the Czechs. In other places guerilla warfare was going on and there was no authority whatever. Many had been killed or wounded. . . .

Captain Coulson and his companion then went to Třeboň and set out to visit all the Czech commanders in their area. The first one they saw, who commanded a regiment, was typical:

The time was past, he said, when we could give him any help. He and his country were now beyond outside help. They would have to help themselves. "*That* is our only help," he suddenly barked, pointing to a map on his table. . . .

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“Every dot you see there is a block-house. And if we are asked to evacuate these, we won’t. Even if we, the officers, wished to evacuate them, our men would not obey. We have drummed it into their heads for months that they must die in these defences. And they will die in them.” . . . Why, why, why, he called repeatedly, why had his people been encouraged to oppose Germany, why had they been dissuaded from making terms with Germany, when France and Britain did not intend to stand by them? His men would never leave their block-houses, he declared. They would fight no matter what happened afterwards. . . .

“The discipline of the Czech Army is surely too good for the men to refuse to withdraw,” I remarked at random. He gave me a dazed look, then smiled as though he suddenly saw an escape from his miserable situation. “Yes,” he replied proudly, “you are right. The men will do what we tell them, and we shall discharge our duty in full order. Few armies could be subjected to such a moral strain and remain unbroken.” His whole manner altered. . . . He began evidently to recover his self-respect and a purpose in life once more. He saw the task before him in a new light; as a feat of endurance, an honourable achievement. . . .<sup>1</sup>

We ourselves remember painfully the shock of seeing one of our friends, a Czech staff officer, when he returned from the front at the end of October. It was only a little over a month since we had seen him, but in that month he had aged at least ten years. He was tormented by the thought that he ought to have disobeyed.

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, January, 1939.

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Among the officers there were some suicides—a few. Other officers were prevented from killing themselves by their men. The men themselves wept and raved when the orders first came through, but then bravely, grimly, they set to work dismantling the fortifications, so that nothing that could be moved should be left inside them. Men struggled along mountain roads loaded like mules, carrying five machine-guns, an incredible weight for a man to carry. As they marched they said to each other: "Well, we did this before. We marched half-way across Siberia, and we gave up our arms, and then we began to fight. Perhaps it will be like that again."

Many Germans of the Sudetenland came pleading to the army, terrified and astounded by the news of Munich. "We have been betrayed, we have been betrayed; we are the people who will really suffer," they cried. They had not wanted union with Germany. "We have been rich in Bohemia and poor in Bohemia, and we want to stay in Bohemia. We are *not* Nazis." They could not do enough for the Czech Army, for the brutal "Soldateska", the "gang of murderers", the "Hussite Bolsheviks", as the German wireless called them in its sober honesty. In some German districts Czech soldiers who went to buy hay for their horses found it given to them at one-third of the price they had paid for it in a Czech district. Czech soldiers would go to a German tobacconist to buy cigarettes, and would be charged for a box of matches but given their cigarettes for nothing. Always they heard the same story: "They have sold us to the Reich. You are Czechs, you will at least have a country of your own. But we, we shall have nothing. *We* are the victims of Munich."

## Czech Mountain Artillery

Czechoslovak General Staff





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On the afternoon of October 5th President Beneš resigned. His fortifications were in Germany's hands, and all the protests, all the conditions he had made, were absolutely unheeded. If he remained, Hitler would threaten his country still further, would demand still more. Already in his own country, which he with Masaryk had made, people were turning against him, reproaching him for his foreign policy, for having bound Czechoslovakia to Western democracy instead of making an easy bargain with Nazi Germany. His speech of resignation, addressed to his "dear fellow-citizens and friends", was simple and free from acrimony, and he, whose whole life-work seemed in ruins, made at this moment no personal apology, spoke only of the people's future:

"I was elected to my present position at an essentially different period. As a convinced democrat, I believe I am right in resigning. . . . The crown of the tree has been cut off, but the roots of our people go deep into the soil. Let us return to those roots, and put into them all our forces, as we have often done in past history. The topmost branches will after a time put forth new shoots. . . .

"I close with the expression of my deep faith in the eternal strength and endurance of our people, in its energy, toughness and endurance, and above all in its devotion to the ideals of humanity, freedom, right and justice, for which it has so often fought and suffered and with which it has always conquered in the end. I too fought for them and shall remain true to them."

The resignation of President Beneš was the first clear sign that Czechoslovakia's independence was now

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merely a name, that all the conscience-comforting visions conjured up in England and France of a country stronger though smaller, happier because more homogeneous, were hollow lies. His fate was not just a personal misfortune. It was a sign that the ideals for which millions of Englishmen, Frenchmen and Americans had died in the Great War were effectively betrayed, and that a new era of tyranny had begun for all Europe, and perhaps for the world.

The day after the President's resignation the Fifth Zone was announced. Czech indignation was bitter. It was aimed far less against Germany than against Great Britain. People said, "If Henderson and François-Poncet spend the rest of their lives trying to atone for this, they will not succeed". *Národní Osvo-bození*, the paper of the Czech Legionaries, wrote: "We hear from the west that we have been saved from the destruction that threatened us, and the leading statesman of the greatest world Power pursues his policy with success. His own country and, still more, France accept this policy, but the consequences of it are felt by a nation in Central Europe which never ceased to work for a good understanding with everyone." *Právo Lidu*, the Czech Social Democratic newspaper, remarked bitterly: "It sounds like a mockery when the British Prime Minister declares that Czechoslovakia was saved from disaster. It is as though one should say after amputating a man's arms and legs and cutting out his lungs that he had been saved from death." It did indeed sound like a mockery.

Captain Coulson describes the effect the Fifth Zone decision had on the officers with whom he was in contact. On October 7th he was in Jindřichův

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Hradec in South Bohemia, with the garrison commander. The new frontier line was not yet known. Would Germany demand the little group of three or four German villages south-east of Jindřichův Hradec, and seize a great belt of purely Czech territory in order to get them? Everyone was waiting:

Suddenly there was a commotion outside the room. The door was flung open, followed by the entrance of the Corps Commander and his Chief of Staff. . . . They were silent and composed, but had they been waiting and wringing their hands they could not have expressed despair more painfully or clearly. . . . [The Chief of Staff] silently opened a large map and spread it on the wall. On it appeared a thick blue line I had not seen before. It was the new frontier . . . main roads, main railway-lines would be cut; towns separated from their countrysides; country districts sundered from their towns; whole villages, even whole towns of the Czechs, included in the ceded territory. . . . "No!" he exclaimed in a rising voice. "We never bargained for this! We have been doubly betrayed—induced to accept certain terms, and then, once we have abandoned our fortifications on the basis of those terms, these have been enormously raised. Had we known what we would have to give up, we should have fought, with allies or without them. We are ruined. What can we do now? . . . We are defenceless. Economically our position is hopeless. We have only one course open. We must go with Germany." As he said this he glanced at me apologetically, as though he had said something mean.

That glance of apology was perhaps the most

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uncomfortable of my many uncomfortable recollections of Czechoslovakia. This man found it in himself, even then, to be ashamed because his country had to turn from its former allies. "Do you know what the worst of all this is?" he went on. . . . "It is that we no longer have any clear distinction between Right or Wrong. We have lost our faith in the rightness of Right. We can only believe in Force, and make our terms with it. And are we mistaken? Let us be realists. What plays the ultimate role, what is the supreme value of the world today but sheer, brutal, naked force?" I protested that we British, at any rate, recognised other and higher values. "Yes," he agreed, but it seemed rather acidly, "that may be. You can afford that luxury. We cannot."

It was on the same day that, meeting an English friend, a journalist, in Prague, we asked him if he would now go home to fight for his King and country. "Rather against them," he replied. He had fought for them in the trenches for four years in the World War.

\* \* \*

Slowly Czechoslovakia settled down to a poor, cramped, fettered existence. The alterations in the map had deprived thousands of people of their homes. A steady stream of refugees, Czechs, Slovaks, German Socialists, Hungarian Socialists and Jews poured into the country at this moment when the whole economy of the State was in ruins, when it had lost at least 40 per cent of its revenue and an enormous amount of State and private property.<sup>1</sup> In 1937 Czechoslovakia had

<sup>1</sup> The Prague banks, which had advanced large sums to distressed Sudeten German industries, were particularly heavy losers.

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been the sixth industrial State in Europe, with an export trade amounting to £84,000,000. She lost at Munich almost all her leading export industries. The State-owned radium mine at Joachimsthal went to Germany. Half the State forests went to Germany, Poland and Hungary. Practically the whole of the china and porcelain industry, and two-thirds of the glass industry, had gone. Of the great textile industry, employing nearly 400,000 people, two-thirds were lost, and of the chemical industry, which had its centre in Aussig, 39 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Most serious of all, Germany and Poland took 90 per cent of Czechoslovakia's lignite (or brown coal) and over half her hard coal.

The loss of the lignite and hard coal was a terrible blow to Czech independence. Lignite was the fuel basis for Czechoslovak industry, for the railways, for the country's electricity supply, for the heating of its houses. Since Germany also took all the chief electric power stations, towns like Prague and Plzeň were now entirely dependent upon German good-will for their electricity supply. They must either buy their electricity from a station in Germany, or buy from Germany

<sup>1</sup> The statistical office in Prague gives the following figures for the losses in Czechoslovakia's annual industrial production (percentages of the former annual output):

	Per Cent		Per Cent
Stone industry . . . . .	53.5	Lace, embroideries . . . . .	74.5
China . . . . .	98.0	Cellulose, cardboard . . . . .	60.5
Fine porcelain . . . . .	89.9	Paper . . . . .	62.8
Sheet glass . . . . .	100.0	Wooden articles . . . . .	53.8
Glass jewellery . . . . .	89.6	Bentwood furniture . . . . .	57.1
Hollow and pressed glass . . . . .	62.5	Musical instruments . . . . .	86.2
Heavy chemical industry . . . . .	39.8	Toys . . . . .	63.0
Oils, fats, soap, candles . . . . .	62.7	Fish preserves . . . . .	66.4
Dyes . . . . .	50.8	Vegetable preserves . . . . .	57.4
Mineral waters . . . . .	73.4	Hats . . . . .	42.6
Yarns . . . . .	39.2	Leather articles . . . . .	51.9
Hosiery . . . . .	75.4	Umbrellas . . . . .	48.0
Haberdashery, buttons . . . . .	86.7	Artificial flowers, feathers . . . . .	92.4

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the lignite to make it. It is not surprising that Prague was not very well heated or well lighted that winter.

Financially Czechoslovakia lost 40 per cent of her revenues, without any compensation from Germany, Poland or Hungary. On top of this, she remained responsible for her State debts, her small post-war foreign debt, and the 42 per cent of the old Austrian debts and 16 per cent of the Hungarian for which she had been made responsible in 1919. Neither Germany nor Hungary showed the slightest inclination to take over these obligations, as in justice they should have done, and the *Essener National Zeitung* flatly declared that Germany would not take over any responsibility for Czechoslovak State debts since the money had been spent to construct a Maginot line.

Germany also acquired about £30,000,000 worth of Czech currency circulating in the Sudetenland. The German authorities fixed the rate of exchange at 12 German pfennigs to the Czech crown, which made the value of the crown in marks about 20 per cent higher than it was in any other currency. The Sudeten Germans at once converted all their crown into marks just as the German Government had intended, so that Germany had suddenly a huge sum in Czech crowns which could be presented to the Czechoslovak National Bank for redemption in gold or "value receivable". The National Bank simply did not possess enough gold or foreign assets to redeem such a sum. Germany therefore had yet another weapon for political or economic blackmail. The Reich then not only refused to compensate the Czech owners of property or businesses in the Sudetenland,<sup>1</sup> but actually proposed that these

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Živnostenská Banka, the largest Czech bank, had to sell its properties in North Bohemia, the Nordböhmische Bergbau A.G.

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losses be set against the £30,000,000 worth of Czech currency, and against the claim that the Czechs should make good the "losses and injustices" suffered by the Sudeten Germans since 1919. The Reich took no account of all that the Czech Government had spent on schools, hospitals, roads and railways in the Sudeten-land since the War.

Is it surprising that many people in Czechoslovakia denounced democracy and the Western Powers, denounced also President Beneš and his whole foreign policy, which seemed to have brought them only to this miserable catastrophe, and demanded a "realistic" co-operation with Berlin. On October 5th Colonel Emanuel Moravec, a well-known Czech military writer, published an article in the Liberal *Lidové Noviny* which showed plainly what was in many people's minds. He said:

German policy has succeeded in paralysing us completely from a military point of view. Do not let us have any illusions about that reality. That is why our policy must, whether we like it or not, find means of bringing about good relations with Germany, with whom we should long ago have come to an agreement if the "chivalrous" Western Powers had not ceaselessly threatened to repudiate their alliance with us.

The same paper had already, on the day before, published an article by "Petr Bily", even more bitter:

and the Brüxer Bergbaugesellschaft which together had a value of one milliard crowns, to the I.G. Farbenindustrie for 150 million crowns. The I.G.F. bought up a great number of important Sudeten German concerns in this way, including the great chemical works in Aussig.

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All that we know is that there has arisen in our neighbourhood a great power with whom our State must not again enter into conflict. We played the role of the policeman keeping Germany in order for long enough, and when the decisive hour came we were abandoned. Good! If it is true that the world must be dominated not by right but by force, then our place is where the force is strongest and the resolution firmest. Let us seek—we can no longer do anything else—for an *entente* with Germany, let us become, like Yugoslavia or Bulgaria, her provider and her customer, and let us say “No” to any manœuvre which might range us in an anti-German front. Let us come to agreement also with all our other neighbours, and let us build up our security on their security and their interests. We wished to fight for the good of humanity, we have been shown that such a fight does not pay; well, let us occupy ourselves with our own good, let us think of ourselves and only of ourselves.

And these articles appeared not in the gutter Press, but in the newspaper which had always been democratic, pro-French, the principal supporter of the policy of Beneš. Then a few days later *Národní Politika*, with the largest circulation in Czechoslovakia, wrote:

The visit of the German Minister of Economics, Herr Funk, to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey indicates how great is the defeat of France and Britain. Diplomatically it shows more or less that the French and British guarantee of our frontiers will not for long have any special value, and that direct political and economic collaboration with Germany, and Italy’s interest in Czechoslovakia,

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will be far more profitable. Our national life will on the one hand have to adapt itself to direct collaboration with the German Reich, and on the other not lose sight of our own national interests. We shall know how to value good relations with Germany.

Friendship with Germany, the end of the Beneš régime, no ties with France or England—these were the new notes. The new Foreign Minister, Dr. Chvalkovský, and various Ministers and bankers, hastened to Berlin to show their country's "loyal attitude" towards Germany. Legionaries sent back their war medals and decorations to England and France. The Czech Fascist and Agrarian (Right Wing) Press opened a virulent and disgusting campaign against President Beneš, his family, his friends and his supporters. They accused Beneš not only of having pursued a blindly wrong policy, but of having taken State money, placed only his creatures in high positions and obstinately refused to listen to the advice of his Ministers abroad, the chief Minister in question being the Agrarian, M. Osusky, Czechoslovak Minister in Paris. Portraits of President Beneš and even of President Masaryk were taken down from the walls in schools and public buildings, even in private houses. Dr. Chvalkovský and the Prime-Minister-to-be, M. Beran, even (it is said on good authority) made the proprietor of a restaurant in Prague take down the pictures of Masaryk and Beneš from the walls, and that Dr. Chvalkovský himself, laughing, hid them behind a cupboard. In the lounge of the Hotel Esplanade the two pictures were replaced overnight by three hunting prints, less offensive to the members of the Gestapo, who flocked there to hold their

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conferences and to take photographs of the pitiful Sudeten German or German refugees who came to see us. In the faculty of philosophy in the University where he had taught, certain students smashed the bust of Masaryk, throwing it down the stairs. October 28th, the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the Republic, was celebrated officially without one word for Masaryk and Beneš, the two men who most of all had made the State. Dr. Alice Masaryk (daughter of the President-Liberator) was compelled to resign from the presidency of the Czechoslovak Red Cross. She left without receiving for twenty years of devoted work one word of thanks from women who, six months before, had courted and flattered her, falling over each other to speak even a few words to her. Now they turned their backs on her at the last meeting at which she presided. The Fascists, the Right-Wing Agrarians, all the reactionaries dared at last to come out into the open and display their hatred for Masaryk and Beneš and for all they had stood for. These very same Agrarians who had sabotaged every attempt to come to terms with the Sudeten Germans, helped Henlein to power and prominence in the hope of making an alliance with him "against Bolshevism", opposed all territorial concessions to Hungary while there was still time, abused the Weimar Republic, screeched with delight at the seizure of Těšín which had embittered the Poles—these were the people who now came out of their hiding places to show their "loyalty to Germany" and to cast the blame for all their own mistakes upon the shoulders of Beneš. These people showed that surrender degrades, just as war degrades, and in both cases it is much the same people that are degraded.

Germany must be placated, therefore reaction could

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triumph. On October 20th the Communist party was "invited to dissolve" itself in Bohemia (it had already been dissolved in the now autonomous Slovakia), and its newspapers were prohibited. The democratic German paper, *Prager Mittag*, had the day before ceased to appear. In its final number it wrote:

The world which the *Prager Mittag* loved, in which spiritually it breathed and worked, is no more. . . . It would have had to discontinue its struggle, to become an organ for the colourless and lukewarm transmission of official news. It would have been its bitter duty to damn what it formerly praised, and praise what it formerly damned. Our friends will understand that we forgo this. . . .

They now demand the closing down of a paper whose loyalty to democracy, whose work for a true friendship between Czechs and Germans of this republic, spoke from every page that it ever published. And now we are told that precisely for this reason we are unpopular, even a hindrance on the new way which must be followed. That is the point at which we must resign. Resign and renounce the right to say what should still be said.

Early in November came a serious attack upon freedom of thought and expression; the *Osvobozené Divadlo*, the "Liberated Theatre", was closed. This may seem a small thing, comparatively unimportant at a time when thousands of people were homeless, suffering and hungry. But the *Osvobozené Divadlo* was not just a theatre, it was the heart of Czech culture; it stood for the whole stubbornly democratic, courageous, free philosophy of the ordinary Czech people. It was one of the outstanding theatres in all Europe. Two young

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men, Voskovec and Werich, who are among the finest clowns of our time, with strongly contrasted yet harmonising temperaments, made it, created all its pieces, and acted them together with a company that they had built up. We ourselves, the first time we went to it, knew no Czech at all, yet it amused and delighted and impressed us. Its greatest achievement was its public. It was a real people's theatre, crammed every night with butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, artists, writers, professors, students, soldiers, businessmen, clerks, waiters, everyone except the Fascists and the near-Fascists, all following with shouts of laughter each turn of wit and political allusion. Political satire was its speciality. Voskovec and Werich had no more love for Fascists and Agrarians than most decent Czechs. They had therefore many enemies in the Czech Right-Wing parties who joyfully seized upon their country's tragedy to take vengeance.

Voskovec and Werich should have opened their new season in October, 1938, with the revue they had played in the summer. But this piece was too full of a spirit of brave optimism from the old Republic to be anything but a tragic irony after Munich, so they decided not to play it. They began writing a new piece based on Bohemian history, but they soon saw that the censorship would never allow it. Finally they decided to open with a new version of an old "vaudeville", wholly innocent of politics. They felt absolutely bound to play, partly because they had contracts with their actors and with the management of the theatre, and partly on principle, since their special and devoted public was waiting impatiently to see what line they would take in the new situation.

Even before the date of the first night was announced

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the Right-Wing newspapers in Prague published violent attacks on Voskovec and Werich, describing them as Jews, "corrupters of the nation's youth", "murderers of the national spirit", "cultural Bolsheviks", "professional cynics", and demanding that such "calumniators of the national interests should be silenced once and for ever". As soon as the actual date of the first night—November 11th, 1938—was known, groups of young Prague fascists, chiefly students of medicine and law, began to organise themselves for demonstrations and for personal attacks on Voskovec and Werich. In a secret meeting of medical students tear-gas bombs were handed out for the evening of the *première*.

On November 7th Voskovec and Werich learned from the Prague Police Department, to which they had sent the text of their piece as usual, that very probably the censorship would have no objections to make, and that the piece could be played without alterations. They were, however, given friendly advice to call at the *Zemský Úřad*<sup>1</sup> and inquire about their licence.<sup>2</sup> The same day they asked the head of the theatrical office in the *Zemský Úřad* if they could count on being able to open on the 9th. This official replied that he could not, at the moment, give them a definite answer.

*V. & W.*: "But our piece has nothing wrong with it in the eyes of the censorship, and our licence runs to the end of the year 1938. We think therefore that two days before our *première*, supposing that

<sup>1</sup> *Zemský Úřad* was a kind of central administration for each of the provinces of the Republic, below the Ministry of the Interior. The Police Department was subordinate to it.

<sup>2</sup> In Czechoslovakia nobody had the right to open a theatre without a licence; the licence was valid for one year, and had to be renewed each succeeding year.

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we are living in a State where law and justice count for anything, we have the right to know if the authorities will let us carry on our profession."

*The Official:* "I am extremely sorry not to be able to give you an exact answer. Ask the Police Department."

The same day, November 7th, Voskovec and Werich went to the Police Department and repeated what they had just been told at the *Zemský Úřad*.

*The Police Official:* "I am ashamed to watch the game they are playing with you, without being able to do anything, but officially I can add nothing to what you have already been told."

*V. & W.:* "Do you think they can take away our licence?"

*The Official:* "If there are demonstrations during the performances they will certainly take it away."

*V. & W.:* "Do you think it impossible that they should close the theatre even before our *première* the day after to-morrow?"

*The Official* (after reflection): "I do not think that at all impossible."

On November 8th, still in this uncertainty, the rehearsals went on and the tickets were sold. On the morning of the 9th, Voskovec and Werich were sent for by the official in the *Zemský Úřad* whom they had seen two days before. Consulting a *dossier*, this gentleman turned to them and said:

"Each one of us must make some sacrifices in these tragic times. The authorities believe that the re-opening of your theatrical season might give rise to trouble caused by extreme nationalists, and

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they therefore ask you voluntarily to give up all idea of playing *for the moment*."

*V. & W.*: "Will the authorities kindly tell us, in that case, who will pay the money we owe to our artistes and to the proprietor of the theatre *for the moment*?"

*The Official* (with an embarrassed smile): "Obviously I cannot answer you."

*V. & W.*: "We regret very much that we are obliged to refuse the service which the authorities ask of us. They ask us, in fact, to close ourselves. Please understand that we have no intention of taking upon ourselves a responsibility which seems too heavy for the Minister of the Interior."

*The Official*: "I understand your attitude perfectly. It is natural. I would only ask you to confirm it in a *procès verbal*."

Voskovec and Werich then signed a *procès verbal* in which they declared that they could not accept the demand of the *Zemský Úřad* voluntarily to keep the *Osvobozené Divadlo* closed for the moment, "because our licence is valid and because we are obliged by our contracts to pay the salaries of the artistes and employees and the rent of the theatre; if we cannot play we shall not have the means we need to cover these expenses".

The same day at nine in the evening a policeman called on Voskovec at his house and handed him the decree closing the theatre, a decree<sup>1</sup> based on two laws of the old Austro-Hungarian empire, one dating from the Bach régime and one from Metternich—the two periods of the blackest reaction in Austrian history. A fitting symbol of the new Czechoslovakia.

<sup>1</sup> We quote the text of this historical curiosity in Appendix II.

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But if reaction triumphed in Bohemia, out-and-out fascism triumphed in Slovakia. On October 6th Slovakia became an autonomous province, with a government of its own independent of the central government, with which the only ministries it had in common were those of Foreign Affairs, National Defence, Finance and Communications. Father Tiso became Prime Minister of Slovakia; he was a Roman Catholic priest and a follower of the late Father Hlinka, whose movement for Slovak autonomy had actually allied itself with Henlein and so helped to cause the country's tragedy. The Vice-Premier was Karel Sidor, also a follower of Hlinka and a man whose treasonable relations with Poland were well known. Dr Tiso gave his first interview as Prime Minister, very suitably, to the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, and in it he declared himself "much gratified by the manner in which the authoritarian States stamped out all elements which were morally and nationally undesirable". The "morally and nationally undesirable elements" in Slovakia were, of course, the Communists, the Social Democrats and, above all, the Czechs. Czech civil servants, doctors and teachers who had devoted the better part of their lives to Slovakia and had raised its level of culture and wealth to something like a Western European standard, were sent packing at a moment's notice. Often they were arrested, imprisoned, ill-treated. One young Czech school teacher and his old father, his wife and their young child, were led handcuffed together through the streets of Bratislava to the town prison. His father died there of heart disease, since the Slovak Government would not allow him to receive medical attention or nursing. His little daughter was kept there alone in a cell. The wives of Czech officials were

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imprisoned with street-walkers and thieves for no other reason than that of being Czechs. The Slovaks smashed up Jewish stores and beat up Jews in the best Nazi manner. A "German Secretary of State" was appointed to watch over the interests of the 170,000-odd Germans in Slovakia, and the whole country was overrun by agents of the Gestapo and their pupils, the "Hlinka Guards"—a para-military organisation aping all other para-military organisations, with the courage and other qualities of Henlein's *Ordners*. One of the most nauseating things that followed Munich was a special number of *Der Stürmer* produced for Slovakia, in which the Slovaks were treated as "true Slavs", martyred and deceived by the lying, bestial Jew-ridden Czechs, and above all by the "Jews' helot" Beneš. This number was sold out in Bratislava. There is no need to say more of the new Slovakia, except that its Government having played with alacrity Berlin's game and demanded a separation from Bohemia, "reparation for injustices", and so on, then (in February and March, 1939) cringed to Prague for money to fill its budget deficit, since even the money it stole from Jews, Czechs and Communists was not enough to pay for the luxury of a Hlinka Guard and jobs for every thug. Mr. Šano Mach, the Slovak Minister of Propaganda, one day received a news-film cameraman, whom he asked to make a film of the Freemasons' rites for the Slovak Government. "But", said the cameraman, "how can I do that? In the first place the Freemasons don't admit people to their meetings, and in the second place you've just suppressed them." "Oh, yes," replied Šano Mach, "but the Hlinka Guard will act it for you!" The only question which seemed to interest Šano Mach was what the cameraman thought of the new uniform of

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the Hlinka Guard. "I don't like it at all", said the cameraman. "It isn't original. It's a bastard copy of the Italian and German uniforms." "Oh, but the boots," interrupted Šano Mach, looking down with pride at his high black boots, "the boots are surely original." "No," said the cameraman firmly, "they're not original either. They're Hungarian." "Yes," said Šano Mach, crestfallen, "but that's one of the things you mustn't say." Vain, ignorant, dishonest, unscrupulous, cruel, like children that pluck the wings of flies, the Slovak Autonomists destroyed carelessly all that the Czechs and loyalist Slovaks had done in Slovakia.

In Ruthenia the story is not quite the same. The Ruthenes also acquired an autonomous Government in October, 1938, but while the Slovaks were willing to play any and every Separatist game, the Ruthenes, having dismissed their first Prime Minister, M. Brody, because he took money from Hungary,<sup>1</sup> concentrated on a "Great Ukraine" campaign, carrying out Germany's wishes to the letter. The Carpatho-Ukraine became now full of German agents, a new German Consulate adorned the village of Chust so graciously left by Hitler and Mussolini to the Ruthenes for their new capital, Jews and Czechs were turned out and Great Russians put into concentration camps, the Russian language was forbidden, Carpatho-Ukrainian Ministers ran to Berlin for their orders. The Ukrainian *émigrés* whom Berlin had been harbouring for twenty years, including the notorious Hetman Skoropadsky, who had played the Germans' game in the Ukraine in 1918, emerged

<sup>1</sup> The most common remark in Carpatho-Ukraine at the time when the Brody Government was in power was, "Oh, if only Andrej (Brody) doesn't sell us again!"

Seite 20 Pfennig

# Der Stürmer

3. Sonder-Nummer

Deutsches Wochenblatt zum Kampfe um die Wahrheit

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## Der Jude und die Tschechoslowakei

### Der Zusammenbruch

In diesen Tagen brach im Osten Europas ein sogenannter „Staat“ in seiner bisherigen Form zusammen. Die Tschechoslowakei. Sie brach in ihre Bestandteile auseinander. Die deutschen Volksgenossen und die deutschen Landsleute lehnten nach Deutschland zurück. Die Polen lebten zurück nach Polen, die Magyaren nach Ungarn. Heute bildet die ehemalige Tschechoslowakei einen Bundesstaat, bestehend aus der Tschechei, aus der Slowakei und aus der Karpatho-Ukraine. Warum ist diese Entwicklung gekommen?

Die ehemalige Tschechoslowakei war zum Kriegsabschluss durch den Vertrag von St. Germain entstanden und konstruiert worden. Es waren in dieser „Staat“ gezwungen worden:

4 Millionen Deutsche,  
24 Millionen Slowaken  
700 000 Ungarn,  
600 000 Ukrainer  
100 000 Polen.

Besonders gegen die Deutsche war in der Tschechoslowakei ein erbitternigster und grausamer Vernichtungskrieg geführt worden. Sie sollten durch systematische Beschädigung ihrer wirtschaftlichen Errichtung befeindet und ausgerottet werden. Daneben wurden sie in ihrer Freiheit unterbrochen und auf das ungewöhnlichste gequält und gepeinigt. Verfolgungswelle auf Verfolgungswelle gingen seit 20 Jahren über das liebevollste judeo-deutsche Land hinweg. Dies zeigte sich besonders in den letzten Wochen und Monaten bis zur Unentzüglichkeit.

Zu diesem planmäßigen Vernichtungskrieg, der gegen die Siedlungsgebiete geführt wurde, kam noch das belästigende und herausfordernde Verhalten der Tschechoslowakei Deutschland gegenüber. Besonders seit dem Jahre 1933, dem Jahre der nationalsozialistischen Revolution, führte die Freie in diesen Landen einen ständigen, häufig erfüllten Verleumdungs- und Hasspelz gegen das Deutsche Reich.



Das geschächte Stauentum

Dieses Bild stammt vom tschechischen Maler Kellner. Es ist einer der wenigen Antisemiten in der Tschechei. Seine Schriften und Werke ließ Bereich verbieten. Kellner zeigt der Öffentlichkeit mit diesem Bild den Möder der slawischen Dörfer: Es ist der Jude!

## Die Juden sind unser Unglück!

Front page of the Special Number  
of *Der Stürmer* for Slovakia



## PAYING FOR PEACE

from their holes and migrated to Chust. Minister Révay went to Berlin in January, 1939, expressly to ask Herr von Ribbentrop "to restore order in Carpatho-Ukraine". (Herr von Ribbentrop is said to have replied that the time had not yet come.) Here again the Czechs for the moment gained the upper hand, since Ruthenia is desperately poor, autonomy is expensive, and the autonomous Government had to face a large budget deficit. But how long could an impoverished Bohemia afford or wish to pay for the follies and treacheries of the Slovak and Ruthene Governments, egged on as they were by a Reich anxious to use them against Prague? How long would it pay the expenses of Nazi propaganda in Slovakia and Ruthenia? How long, too, would the Third Reich wait before splitting up what remained of the mutilated Republic by pretending to protect the Slovaks and Ruthenes against the invented tyranny of Prague?

Czechoslovakia, or Czecho-Slovakia, as it had to call itself in deference to the Slovaks, became more and more of a "good neighbour" to Germany. The old parties in Bohemia and Moravia dissolved themselves, and two parties took their place.<sup>1</sup> (The Government Press called this change, euphemistically but misleadingly, an approach to the English and American democratic systems.) The first of the new parties, the "party of National Unity" (*Strana Národní Jednoty*), swallowed up the Agrarians, the majority of the Czech National Socialists (once Dr. Beneš's party), the (Catholic) People's party, the National Democrats, the Traders' party and the (Fascist) National League. The

<sup>1</sup> In Slovakia the former autonomist party of Tiso and Sidor had already outlawed all other parties and formed what they called the party of "Slovak Unity".

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second party, the tamed Opposition, a National Labour party (*Národní Práce*), included some members of the Czech National Socialist party, and the Social Democrats. A few members of the chamber had the courage to remain outside the parties. The leadership of the two parties fell to the more reactionary of the old party bosses, and most independent statesmen, such as Dr. Krofta or M. Zenkl, had nothing to do with them. No Jews, of course, might enter the "party of National Union". With its Slovak ally the Government party had a huge majority in the Chamber—222 to 61. But even this was not enough.

At the beginning of December General Syrový's government of transition resigned. It had come through this most terrible catastrophe without a revolution, without even a financial crisis, a contrast to Hungary, which, after its territories had been cut down by the Treaty of Trianon, suffered two reigns of terror and a financial crisis which lasted for twenty years. On December 1st M. Rudolf Beran formed his new Government. The official Press described it as a "Government of specialists and technicians", that is, it contained four members of the former Agrarian party, M. Sidor, and nine others.<sup>1</sup> M. Beran, the ex-secretary of the Agrarian party and its *éminence grise* for twenty years, had always opposed, openly or secretly, Dr. Beneš. He was intensely unpopular with the people of Czechoslovakia, who thought he was a traitor and a profiteer. On December 13th M. Beran introduced in Parliament an Enabling Act, granting his Government full powers for two years. There were fierce protests, but rebellion would have been suicide. So the

<sup>1</sup> Of the Slovak and Ruthene Cabinets there is nothing to say. They were exactly as expected.

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Republic founded by Masaryk and Beneš renounced parliamentary government because it might offend Germany and hamper the authorities in conciliating Hitler.

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This is what surrender is like. This is the initial price of peace-at-any-price. When we watched it we understood why men fight for independence, even though war so often destroys much more than even the winners of it win.

## Chapter XII

### THE LION IN THE CAGE

“**A**LION is a lion even in a cage; he doesn’t turn into a donkey,” said Masaryk to Karel Čapek. A Czech is a Czech even under alien tyranny, he doesn’t turn into a Nazi.

The Czech people, unlike the Slovaks, did not change. In the first days and weeks after the disaster many of the best and bravest of them were demoralised, wounded to death, hating even the miserable Sudeten German refugees who came flocking to Prague. “We must have no more Germans here, we must be alone with our own people.” There was a wave of *Selbst-gleichschaltung*, of doing Hitler’s work for him without giving him even the trouble of making formal demands: some of it, as we have described, far from disinterested, but some of it due to real, sincere demoralisation. Then, after a very few weeks, there came a sudden quick recovery. Friends who had horrified and depressed us by their hatred for the refugees, suddenly changed completely and went to the Red Cross to find out how best they could help them. They were not happier, they realised what had happened to their country and their lives perhaps more clearly still, but they had become themselves again. The Czech people, they would do, sullenly, grudgingly and badly, what the Germans demanded of them, because they could do no other—the Western Powers had seen to that. And in

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any case, what was the use of resisting now? They had been ready to resist in September, and to what had that readiness brought them? Now they were helpless, and they must concentrate on preserving the nation by hard work, and on waiting for their time to come. "In these dark winter days, when the dense fog surrounding us physically and spiritually does not allow any hopeful outlook in the future, all energy is necessary to hold out, to go through, to persevere. But as always in our history, so in these days you feel a new mental resistance arising in all different spheres. There is a motionless quiet, but only quiet looking forward. . . . The death of Čapek<sup>1</sup> gathered all the writers on the old democratic basis, on the basis of our cultural tradition. All our writers worthy of being so-called . . . made very decisive declarations for spiritual liberty and against any experiment of *Gleichschaltung*."<sup>2</sup> Or, as another wrote to us, "It is certainly not easy to suppress the whole nation".

The Czech people will remain quietly true to Masaryk. Where they can they will even show that they are true. The party of National Unity could, by January, 1939, collect no more than six to eight per cent of the total membership of the old parties which it supplanted, but the National Labour Party was obliged to stop taking members when it reached the 60,000 mark, for it would never have done for the opposition to be stronger than the Government!

Just after the Great War there appeared an out-

<sup>1</sup> Karel Čapek died on Christmas Day, 1938. He really died of Munich, like many other Czechs in those days—people who died of ordinary illnesses which would never have killed them if Munich had not weakened their will to live and their vitality.

<sup>2</sup> From a letter which the writers received from a friend in Prague in January, 1939

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standing novel called *The Good Soldier Schwejk*—the story of a Czech soldier in the Austrian Army who muddled and dallied his way through the war, always wrecking the careers of his Austrian masters, always getting the better of the Austrian authorities by a mixture of simplicity and sabotage. The spirit of Schwejk walked abroad in post-Munich Bohemia. “What is the new flag of Czechoslovakia? The *Hachakreuz*.” “Who is President Hácha? The first President of the second Republic of the Third Reich.” These are typical Schwejkish jokes. The Czech people mock at their Government, they mock at the Hlinka Guard, they mock at Germany, they mock at the Western Powers. They must wait, and they are waiting.

Meanwhile Kundt, Henlein’s former lieutenant and now *Führer* of the 250,000 Germans left within Czechoslovakia, did his best to govern the country, and M. Chvalkovský, the Foreign Minister, was summoned regularly to Berlin to receive his orders. Kundt, in his New Year message to the Czechs, warned them that they were “embedded in the economic realm of Germany”, and could live “only if they, as the smaller nation, are built into the economic framework of this great country”. Dr. Chvalkovský went, in January, 1939, to Berlin, where his hosts tried with threats to persuade the Czechs to accept a customs union, the Nürnberg laws, and—above all—a military union, with a German military mission established in Prague with all the privileges of the former French mission. The Germans also demanded a large part of the Czechoslovak gold reserve. The Czechs resisted all these demands, though they had to allow many others—they tinkered at anti-Semitic legis-

*Centopress, Prague*

President Hacha





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lation (though there was scarcely any anti-Semitism), they allowed Kundt to form a Nazi party with the right to fly the *Hakenkreuz* flag, they were compelled to keep up the German university and technical high schools at enormous expense to their wretchedly poor country, simply to save Hitler the money and to be a useful means of causing trouble.<sup>1</sup> Even M. Beran, the former Germanophile, had the courage to resist Germany's most outrageous demands. A Czech friend said to us, "I have always been against Beran, but I must admit that he has had more courage than any of the statesmen of the Western Powers—he has resisted at least four of Hitler's demands". And President Hácha, the former head of the Czechoslovak Supreme Court, who succeeded Dr. Beneš as President on November 30th, 1938, is an honest and courageous man and a sincere democrat. He could not resist German demands when the Germans threatened to invade Bohemia, but he resisted resolutely those who, even before Germany made the demand or the threat, would have given in on vital matters.

Bohemia, at the beginning of 1939, was a Nazi colony, inhabited chiefly by anti-Nazis. All independent Czech newspapers had been suppressed,<sup>2</sup> and those that remained were more Nazi than the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. They represented Russia as the source of all evils, the Western Powers as decadent and

<sup>1</sup> The Czech Government also yielded to an explicit German demand for the suppression of the paper of the Legionaries, *Národní Osvobození*, the only decent newspaper left in the Republic. This was the first Czech paper to support reconciliation with the Sudeten Germans and with the Weimar Republic. Its editor, Dr. Lev Sychrava, was the first Czech to go into exile in 1914 to take part in Masaryk's work for liberation.

<sup>2</sup> For example, *Národní Osvobození*, *Sobota* (Czech Socialist weekly), *Hlas Práce* (Socialist Youth organ) were all stopped in January, 1939. *Lidové Noviny*, still mildly independent, and *Přítomnost*, a weekly, were in great danger.

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finished, the Jews as the plague of Czechoslovakia, all in the best *Völkischer Beobachter* style. Nobody read them. Everybody read poetry, the only means of free speech left; and everybody read and re-read the classic speech which M. Ladislaus Rašín<sup>1</sup> made in the Chamber on December 14th—a speech that was banned but smuggled from hand to hand in typed or mimeographed sheets, for it expressed exactly the Czech people's contempt for their Government, their contempt for Germany, their real, deep respect for the tradition of Masaryk and Beneš, and their conviction that their time will come again. M. Rašín said:

“The Chamber has learnt with pleasure that the Prime Minister, and doubtless the whole Government too, have not the slightest wish to conceal themselves from control by public opinion. In this gesture I see a promise for the future, a promise which also means the liberation of the Press, fettered at present by the censorship, and restoration of the right of public meeting. So long as these conditions are not realised it is idle to speak of ‘control by public opinion’. . . .

“The words of consolation pronounced by the Prime Minister, that we have made a sacrifice for peace, a sacrifice never before in history asked of any country, bring poor consolation. It is certain that we have struck a mortal blow at our country and it is doubtful whether we have saved peace for longer than a few months. I was not one of those who wished to save peace at the price we have paid. ‘There where

<sup>1</sup> M. Rašín is the son of the Republic's first great finance minister, Alois Rašín, murdered by a Communist in 1923. He was the leader of the National Democrats, but refused to enter the party of national unity with his colleagues and became an independent deputy.

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the tribunes cried peace, I, like a rebel, cried for battle and I was not alone.' . . . I believed that we should have risked the danger of war with all its horrors, if our people wishes to live free . . . and at this present moment the Prime Minister can only say sadly: 'The territory on which we had organised our national and economic life has been cut down.' . . .

"I agree that those responsible for our national catastrophe should be found, but we must take care that the nation, on the threshold of a new life, should not anew be divided into two violently opposed camps. . . . Nothing could be more harmful than to introduce into public life the old habits of hatred and political rancours and vengeances. It is in this sense that I wished to underline the Prime Minister's words on the Press, which he considers as a cultural element responsible, in a modern State, for the heavy task of creating public opinion and national character.

"But, illustrious house, rarely in our political history of the last fifty years have we witnessed such orgies of hatred, anger and vengeance as those of the last few weeks. I do not see cultural activity and the creation of national character in this. Certainly a fault or mistake made by a political opponent gives a free journalist the right . . . to criticise him mercilessly, but it gives no one the right to attack his personal honour, his wife's honour, or that of his family. Do not let us forget that it is often by campaigns of this kind that we do harm to our own honour and to our own national dignity when, in an effort to satisfy the instincts of the masses, we give an impression as if our joy in seeing the fall of a political opponent was greater than the sorrow caused by our national catastrophe. . . . We cannot continue to inculcate in the

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national character hatred towards our own people, even if they were mistaken, in a period when there are so many reasons why Czech hatred should turn in another direction. . . .

“Finally, I should like to say this: the Prime Minister declared: ‘We recognise the fact that our compatriots are under the domination of another State, but in their cultural and moral union with us we do not see and will not see any obstacle to a loyal attitude towards the States of which they have become citizens.’

“ Illustrious house, such a recognition can only be temporary. . . . I know very well that it is not the moment for a revisionist programme, but I cannot, like one of my colleagues, say that I consider all that has happened as final, as concluded. A small flame of national faith *must* shine in the soul of the nation. A nation is only great by the power of its courage, the fervour of its faith and the greatness of its decision to bear sufferings and make sacrifices for the future. The Czech nation waited three hundred years for its renewed independence. For tens of years the Poles waited for this resurrection, the Hungarians have waited twenty years for their revision. We, too, we must wait, nourish the little flame of faith so that it does not die, so that we do not cower in resignation, so that the people of the Warriors of God does not become a people of cowardly slaves. History has already seen many Great Powers appear and disappear. In the end it is the character of the nation which will decide if perhaps not we, then at least our children, shall live to find again a new and better liberty and a new independence.

“When I first entered this Chamber, I swore to be

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faithful to the Czechoslovak Republic. To-day, in this place, I repeat that I shall remain faithful to that Republic to which I promised my fidelity. . . .”

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A lion is a lion even in a cage, but lions sometimes die in cages. On Wednesday, March 15th, 1939, Hitler entered Prague.

Five days before, in the early hours of March 10th, Prague had dismissed the Slovak Government, arrested Dr. Tiso and several of his ministers, disarmed the Hlinka guard and arrested most of its leaders. The central government seemed for a moment to have re-established its authority, and to have shown, as Mr. Gedye cabled to the *New York Times*, that “autonomy will not be allowed to degenerate into treason”. General Eliáš, a Czech general, was given supreme command in Slovakia, and when M. Chvalkovsky called upon the German chargé d’affaires in Prague to tell him what had been done, he was told that Germany regarded the whole matter as an internal affair for Czechoslovakia.

The German chargé d’affaires had clearly not listened to his own country’s broadcasting stations. From the moment of the *coup* the German stations (worst of all of them Vienna) poured out a sudden stream of lies, abuse, “atrocity-mongering” against the Prague Government, and assured the Slovaks and the Germans of Slovakia of Germany’s benevolent protection. M. Durčianský, Tiso’s Minister of Justice who had fled to Vienna, was declared to be “the sole constitutional representative of the Slovak people”. Herr Karmašin, leader of the German minority in Slovakia, promised that “the Germans of Slovakia will fight shoulder to

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shoulder with the young Slovak people". Czech soldiers and gendarmes could do little against the Slovak mobs, for how could they charge, let alone fire on, Slovak demonstrators when there were Germans among them? They did not wish to give to Hitler a vom Rath.

Hitler did not need one. On March 13th Tiso, the vain, stupid country priest, ready instrument for a blasphemous invader, went to Berlin to ask for "protection". Nobody now dared to stop him. German troops were concentrating in ever-increasing numbers not only on the Slovak frontier but on Bohemia's borders too. The German Press and Wireless increased their foul attacks on the "Hussite Bolsheviks", on "these murderers of peaceful Slovak and German peasants", and went on inciting the Slovaks to rebellion. And on Tuesday, March 14th, Slovak independence was proclaimed, Hungarian troops marched into the Carpathian Ukraine, and the German Army crossed the frontier of Moravia.

That night President Háchá, summoned to Berlin, with his daughter and with his Foreign Minister, rushed to Berlin to try to make some terms, any terms for his suffering people. Hitler received the visitors with courtesy; but the Czechs were threatened, both by German officers and through a diplomatic channel, that Prague would be bombed and Bohemia devastated if the Czech people and army should not surrender wholly and at once and without any resistance. And so at 4.30 in the morning of March 15th, 1939, the Czech people and army heard this desperate warning by wireless:

"Attention! Attention! Order from the President of the Republic! Order from the Minister of National Defence! To all formations!

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“German Army infantry and aircraft are beginning occupation of the Republic’s territory at 6 A.M. Their advance must not be resisted. The slightest resistance will bring most unforeseeable consequences. In that case they would intervene with utter brutality.

“All commands have to obey the order. The units will be disarmed. Military and civil aeroplanes must remain in airports. None must take to the air.”

This warning came again and again, at five-minutes intervals:

“Attention! Attention! . . . German Army. . . . Occupation of the Republic’s territory. . . . Must not be resisted. . . . Utter brutality. . . . Disarmed. . . .

“Attention! Attention! . . .”

Czech people hid their faces at the sight of the German troops. They sang the Czech national anthem and would not be silenced. They threw snowballs at German tanks. They greeted German troops with boos and hisses and with tears. . . . Hitler desecrated the Hradčany and showed himself to the mustered Nazis of Prague. . . . “This invader has no right in this territory, but by force of might has taken all the wealth, property, industry, raw materials, gold and monies which the great efforts of 15,000,000 people have created in the last twenty years.” That Czech soldier who carried five machine-guns back from the fortifications carried them in vain. . . . And there came not only the German Army but the German terror. . . . What human agony and suffering to be placed to the debit of Munich!

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To Munich it belongs. Hitler's invasion of Bohemia was a direct consequence of what Chamberlain and Daladier did at Munich in September, 1938. For at Munich the British and French Governments tricked the Czechs out of their defences, only to leave them alone to Hitler's mercy. Because of what Great Britain and France did in September, 1938, Hitler could do what he liked with the Czechs; and whatever Hitler may do to the Czechs, Great Britain and France are responsible for it.

*PART II*

RESPONSIBILITIES AND  
THE FUTURE



## WAS HITLER BLUFFING?

WHY did it happen, the surrender of Czechoslovakia? Whose fault was it? This is not just a question of recriminations or a question only about the past: if it were, we should leave it out. It is a question urgently concerning everyone who values freedom. For if the still free peoples allow the causes of that disaster and disgrace to go on working, freedom will be dead in all Europe and menaced in America. Perhaps even then the nations will not escape an all-embracing war.

Let us step back from the terrible spectacle of a martyred people, a people whose martyrdom goes on and on, daily and prosaic. Let us swallow for a moment the shame of seeing two great democracies aid an aggressor and force the Government of a small democracy to break its constitutional oath and deceive its people. Let us even hold at a distance, if events allow, those world-wide evils arranged in London on September 18th, 1938; the doubling of the strength of a predatory coalition, and the democracies' betrayal of what will have to be their war aims if a next war comes upon them. There is, of course, a case for the bargain of Munich—a very strong case if it is valid. Is it strong enough to outweigh the case against? And is it valid?

Is it strong enough? Let Mr. Chamberlain himself put it. He said on October 6th, 1938:

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"Anybody who had been through what I had to go through day after day, face to face with the thought that in the last resort it would have been I, and I alone, who would have to say that yes or no which would decide the fate of millions of my countrymen, of their wives, of their families—a man who had been through that, could not readily forget. . . . When



CZECHOSLOVAKIA TO-DAY. From *The Times* of March 18, 1939

war starts to-day, in the very first hour, before any professional soldier, sailor or airman has been touched, it will strike the workman, the clerk, the man-in-the-street or in the bus, and his wife and children in their homes. . . . When you think of these things you cannot ask people to accept a prospect of that kind; you cannot force them into a position that they have got to accept it, unless you feel yourself, and can make them feel, that the cause for

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which they are going to fight is a vital cause—a cause transcending all the human values, a cause to which you can point, if some day you win the victory, and say ‘That cause is safe!’ ”

If only Mr. Chamberlain had simply said that; if only he had not claimed that the bargain of Munich was “self-determination” or “peace with honour”, that the International Commission would protect the Czechs, that the Czechs had accepted the Franco-British plan of September 19th unconditionally, that the Runciman Mission had gone to Prague “in response to a request from the Czechoslovak Government”, there would be far less reason to think that it was no accident that in September, 1938, the great sufferer was democratic liberty. But in any case no honest judge can evade asking whether a world war, once started, would not have done damage for which nothing could make up, and whether there is not always, as long as war has not yet started, at least a chance of preventing it and of getting things put right in the end without war.

What honest person can give a confident answer, no or yes? For anybody who is still free is face to face at last with a cruel dilemma—peace or freedom? Industrialised war between Great Powers could reduce civilisation—liberty with it—to meaningless chaos; and yet, liberty once lost to pay for peace, men will fight to regain it, as they have forlornly fought again and again in history. The dilemma is cruel, but let us at least admit it and look for an escape.

Is this dilemma, this hard choice between peace and freedom, inevitable? Was it inevitable before September, 1938? If not, has the essential effect of the betrayal of Czechoslovakia been perhaps to take away

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from human beings—in the whole of Europe at least, and perhaps more widely still—what they had until that surrender, the chance of keeping peace otherwise than by selling liberty for respite from war? Or is there still a chance of keeping peace by making a stand for freedom? If so, what are the forces which in 1938 destroyed that chance and may do so again? These are the real problems that underlie the crisis of 1938 and make it still important—more and more important.

Two concrete questions are involved. The first is this. One thing—one only—could perhaps really justify the betrayal of Czechoslovakia, and that is the horror of modern war, if indeed there was a real danger of European war over Czechoslovakia in 1938; but did Hitler mean war at any time in 1938? Or was it all a bluff, and was the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia in vain? Was the case for the bargain of Munich valid? Or did the betrayal of Czechoslovakia perhaps not save peace at all because peace was never in danger?

To most people the question must at first sight seem absurd. We, ourselves, in the middle of September, thought that after his colossally dislocating partial mobilisation and his speech that ended the Nürnberg Congress, Hitler had gone too far to withdraw; Hitler, we thought, was, like other dictators, surrounded by yes-men, and a Great Britain exceptionally vulnerable to bombs, yet still neglecting (of all things) home front defence, might have given to their flatteries just enough basis to make even a definite threat of collective resistance fail to deter him. Of his visit to Berchtesgaden on September 15th, Mr. Chamberlain afterwards said:

“I have no doubt whatever now, looking back,

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that my visit alone prevented an invasion, *for which everything was ready.*<sup>1</sup>

Of course, nearly everybody accepted that statement. But is it true?

Already on September 18th we ourselves had begun to doubt if Hitler meant to fight, for we then heard that, as far as the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service could make out, there were only 22 German divisions concentrated around Czechoslovakia. (Later the Germans themselves claimed to have had 30 divisions along the Czechoslovak frontiers, 15 of these divisions being mechanised or motorised.)<sup>2</sup> That, of course, was not nearly enough to start an invasion of Czechoslovakia, whose formidable fortifications had already been quietly manned. Clearly, it is not true that, three days after Chamberlain visited Berchtesgaden, "everything was ready" for a German invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Even after Godesberg, the Germans were strangely cautious. On September 23rd, when France and Great Britain allowed the Czechs to mobilise, the French Minister added that his Government had no news of fresh German military movements.<sup>3</sup> In Czechoslovakia a general mobilisation, in France a partial mobilisation followed—still Germany did not mass for a serious attack. On September 27th, when Chamberlain warned Beneš that, according to the information he had from Berlin, the German Army would receive orders to cross the Czech frontier almost at once if the Czechs had not accepted the terms of Godesberg by 2 p.m. next day,<sup>4</sup> this message amazed (we are told) an officer of the

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, September 28th, 1938; Hansard, col. 15, our italics.

<sup>2</sup> This information was given by Major von Wedel, head of the Press Section of the German High Command, in a dialogue broadcast by the German wireless. See *Prager Tageblatt*, October 28th, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 116.

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Czechoslovak General Staff, for he knew that the Germans had not nearly enough divisions near Czechoslovakia, that they would need some sixty more for a serious attack, and that it would take a good four days to gather them, complete with their material. Again, according to Mr. Chamberlain,<sup>1</sup> Hitler himself on September 27th told Sir Horace Wilson that Germany, failing a Czech surrender, would mobilise at 2 P.M. next day, yet at 2.40 in the morning of the 28th the official German News Agency publicly denied this. The denial came three hours after the mobilisation of the British Fleet had at last begun, and nine hours before Mussolini made that appeal which—so Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier asserted—induced Hitler to put off for a day the threatened general mobilisation of the German forces.<sup>2</sup> And meanwhile, “while the English were digging trenches in Hyde Park nobody dug trenches in the Berlin Tiergarten, though in a great war Berlin would certainly have been bombed”.<sup>3</sup> At Berchtesgaden on September 15th, according to Mr. Chamberlain, Hitler had “declared categorically that rather than wait he would be prepared to risk a world war”.<sup>4</sup> It looks as if really that was a bluff.

Could Hitler have won if war had come in September, 1938? Against a Czechoslovakia deserted by France and Great Britain, yes, very likely. Franco-British desertion would put Poland and Hungary on Hitler’s side. Hitler could even count on British and French help,

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, September 28th, 1938; Hansard, col. 26.

<sup>2</sup> The mobilisation of the British Fleet was announced at 11.30 P.M. on September 27th; the *D.N.B.* issued its denial at 2.40 A.M. on the 28th; and Mussolini’s *démarche* was at 11.45 A.M.

<sup>3</sup> *Economist*, October 15th, 1938, Berlin correspondent.

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons, September 28th, 1938; Hansard, col. 14.

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very effective even if called "non-intervention", in case Russia should help the Czechs even without France. But suppose France and Great Britain had stood firm in 1938, what were Hitler's chances?

Before and after Munich many people in both Great Britain and France looked hard for excuses for betraying the Czechs, and one of their excuses was that nobody could rely on Russia. Lord Winterton, for instance, then Chancellor of the Duchy, said that "Russia only made very vague promises owing to her military weakness".<sup>1</sup> But why, if that is what the British Government really thought, did the British Foreign Office issue, on the evening of September 26th, a *communiqué*, never repudiated, which said: "If in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France"? What are the facts? Were Russia's promises in fact vague? Already on March 17th, just after the invasion of Austria, M. Litvinov proposed an international conference to find means of preventing another *coup de force*; but this proposal the British Government rejected.<sup>2</sup> On September 2nd M. Litvinov saw the French Ambassador in Moscow, who asked what Russia would do if Czechoslovakia were attacked; and here is M. Litvinov's answer:

"We intend to fulfil our obligations under the

<sup>1</sup> In a speech at Shoreham; see *The Times*, October 11th, 1938. Challenged on this speech in the House of Commons on November 14th, 1938, neither Lord Winterton nor the Prime Minister would withdraw the statement that Russia was vague and weak.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Chamberlain, on March 24th, 1938, said that the Russian proposal would involve "less a consultation with a view to settlement than a concerting of action against an eventuality which has not yet arisen".

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pact<sup>1</sup> and, together with France, to afford assistance to Czechoslovakia by the ways open to us. Our War Department is ready immediately to participate in a conference with representatives of the French and Czechoslovak War Departments to discuss the measures appropriate.

“Independently of this, we should consider it desirable that the question should be raised at the League of Nations, if only as yet under Article XI, with the object first of mobilising public opinion and secondly of ascertaining the position of certain other States whose passive aid might be extremely valuable.

“It is necessary, however, to exhaust all means of averting an armed conflict, and we consider one such method to be an immediate consultation between the Great Powers to decide on the terms of a collective *démarche*.<sup>2</sup>

Again, on September 19th, when the Czechoslovak Government asked whether Russia would give Czechoslovakia prompt and effective help if France should do the same, the Russian answer was “Yes”. Yet again, on September 23rd, although the Czechs, by accepting the Franco-British plan, had virtually repudiated their alliance with Russia, M. Litvinov announced formally to the League of Nations that Russia would still aid the

<sup>1</sup> The pact of mutual assistance between Russia and Czechoslovakia was concluded in May, 1935. It was first conceived as one part of a general regional pact—an Eastern Locarno—in which Germany and Poland should take part. They refused. The Czechoslovak Government then stipulated that Russian assistance, in case of war, should depend on French assistance. Even this precaution did not save the Czechs from being the target of anti-Bolshevik propaganda in Great Britain and France.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted and reaffirmed by M. Litvinov in his speech at Geneva on September 21st; see *Daily Telegraph*, September 22nd, 1938.

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Czechs if France were to do the same;<sup>1</sup> and on that same day, at four in the morning, Russia had warned Poland that, if Polish troops should cross the Czechoslovak frontiers at any point, the pact of non-aggression between Russia and Poland would be no longer in force.<sup>2</sup> Afterwards M. Vavrečka, Czechoslovak Minister of Propaganda at that time, a business man from the firm of Bat'a and therefore hardly a communist, said in a broadcast on October 2nd that "without doubt Soviet Russia was ready to go to war". Was Russia able, as well as willing, to help effectively? There were in Czechoslovakia by September, 1938, about 200 of the latest Russian aeroplanes, which the Czechs had bought from Russia;<sup>3</sup> there were also, close to the Lithuanian frontier, many Russian bombers ready to fly to Czechoslovakia and to bomb Berlin on their way. There had been regular conversations between the Czechoslovak and Russian General Staffs, with the fullest exchange of military secrets. At about 5 p.m. on September 21st a message came to the Czechoslovak Government from its Minister in Moscow, urging it to send a 'plane at once to Kiev for the Russian liaison officers.<sup>4</sup> On the Polish frontier, so the Riga correspondent of *The Times* reported, formidable Russian forces were massed.<sup>5</sup> At Geneva, on September 11th,

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, September 24th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Their presence gave rise to a tragi-comic protest from the Czech Communist Party, which took them for German machines.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> "Whatever the Soviet Government's real hopes and intentions, they have a formidable force ready within striking distance—numerically stronger, indeed, than the whole of Poland's peace army, equipped abundantly and, in spite of the havoc caused by 'purging' since 1937, capable of making a nasty mess of Poland in a very short time. Within 200 miles of the frontier, in the special Kiev and White Russian Military Districts since their reorganisation in August, they have approximately 30 infantry divisions, mostly at between

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M. Litvinov and the Roumanian Foreign Minister reached an agreement by which Russian troops might go through Roumania to help the Czechs.<sup>1</sup> For some time the Roumanians had been working hard to improve the communications between their Russian frontier and the eastern tip of Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> The Russians, too, had been hard at work on their roads and railways in the west, and already in May "Czechoslovak military circles" were "satisfied that the Red Army has overcome one of Russia's greatest military weaknesses—the state of her road system—by special adaptations of mobile mechanised material".<sup>3</sup> What effect had the "purges" had on the Russian forces? As late as August 30th—not a very well-chosen moment—the Russian Government announced that Admiral Orloff, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, had been shot as a traitor, together with the admirals commanding the Baltic Fleet and the Naval Academy; and so many others were missing that none of the naval officers who had held high posts a year before were still in place. These "purges" were not only a damning proof that there is little to choose between Nazism and Bolshevism—a tragic contrast to the ideals which had helped to

three-quarters and full war strength, each division composed of three regiments and strong artillery, tank, chemical, and aviation sections—altogether between 330,000 and 350,000 men. The air force available for this army has something like 3000 aeroplanes, mostly heavy bombers and fast fighters of the newest types. At Minsk, Slutsk, Novgorod, Volynsk, Proskuroff and other places near the frontier are extremely numerous cavalry and tanks—five cavalry corps . . . two tank corps, and 10 tank brigades—altogether a minimum of 50,000 sabres and 2000 tanks. In the case of hostilities the tanks intend to make a breach for the cavalry in the south. . . . Also . . . even without mobilisation the Red Army is already much above nominal peace strength. . . ." (*The Times*, September 26th, 1938; see also the article by Georges Friedman in *Europe*, January 15th, 1939.)

<sup>1</sup> *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 1st, 1938; see also *The Times*, September 12th, 1938, Geneva correspondent. <sup>2</sup> Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, May 8th, 1938, Prague correspondent.

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cause the Russian Revolution—they were also a sign of grave internal disunity, and they must have damaged badly both the brains and the morale of the Russian forces. Yet, even so, both the army and the air force of the U.S.S.R. must have been formidable, if only because the sheer numbers of their trained pilots and soldiers were so vast that it would have taken a massacre to cause a shortage. Russian material had done well in Spain; so had Russian pilots; Russia had also in plenty most of the raw materials essential for war, and most of her key industries were hard for bombers to reach. In short, it looks as if Russia was ready, willing and able to help the Czechs quite effectively against a German attack. So the Czech experts thought, and they, having had frank technical exchanges with the Russians, must have known the full facts more nearly than the French and British experts—far more nearly than a Lindbergh, however eminent. If France had marched, Russia would have marched too, and the result must have been a neutral Poland—perhaps later hastily fulfilling her alliance with France—while Roumania and Jugoslavia would have checked any Hungarian aggression under the terms of the Little Entente. What, then, were Hitler's chances?

In a war at all prolonged and fought to a finish, hopeless. Fifteen years of relatively complete disarmament had made the German Army very short indeed of officers and trained reserves—even small Czechoslovakia alone had nearly as many trained reserves as Hitler's Germany in September, 1938. Even to the German air force these fifteen years of non-existence were a crushing disadvantage, for although nearly all its machines were new, it was very short of trained crews, and crews are far harder to replace than machines—the more so as

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machines become faster and anti-aircraft defences more effective. A few months, then, and Germany would have been at a crushing disadvantage in the air; a year of war and the German Army would be badly officered and half-trained. Germany's aircraft industry was magnificent; but the whole war industry of Germany was already working at full stretch and taking up a wartime share of the country's resources (the people had to go short of butter for the sake of guns); so that if war had come, Germany's war industry could not have expanded much, while the British and French war industries would have been expanding every month. Perhaps, because Great Britain was exceptionally vulnerable and had left home front defence to the last, Germany might have half-paralysed the British war industries at the start and delayed their planned expansion; still there would be the war industries of Canada and Australia and, very likely, supplies also from the U.S.A. for the countries superior at sea. Meanwhile, the German and Italian industries were vulnerable to bombers—more so than the French—while that of Russia was very hard for bombers to reach. Above all, the war industries of Germany would soon have been short of essential raw materials. Hitler had not, until after the Munich Agreement, the chance to draw upon the food and fuel and minerals of south-eastern Europe. If Italy had stayed neutral, Great Britain and France could not have blockaded Germany at once; but even so, how could Germany hold out? With what could Germany buy the vast imports needed for war? And if Italy had gone in with Germany, the first thing likely to happen was the loss of two Italian armies—one in Spain, one in Abyssinia, both cut off. Italy could have stirred up trouble in Palestine and Egypt, kept a good many

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French divisions in Africa and on the Alps, and perhaps sent some divisions against the Czechs at a critical moment; but not perhaps for long, for one of the first things General Gamelin had planned to do, if war broke out, was to land French troops at once in southern Italy. Italy, very poor, had had a bad harvest, and the people, war-weary already because of Spain, hated the Germans with an old, deep and agreeing hatred. Hitler then, whether alone or with Italy, had no chance of winning a long war against France, Great Britain, Czechoslovakia and Russia.

Could Hitler have won a lightning war against this coalition? A leading light of the City of London told us after Munich that Germany had 1500' planes set aside for bombing London and that the British authorities expected 30,000 casualties in the first twenty-four hours.<sup>1</sup> Many people in England and France tried to justify betraying the Czechs by pointing out that the French Air Force was very weak and that British anti-aircraft defences hardly existed. Yet these facts were clearly not decisive, for in spite of them, on September 26th and 27th, the British and French Governments themselves threatened war. Either their threat was only a bluff or they at least judged that no attack from the air

<sup>1</sup> In the *Daily Telegraph* of September 12th, 1938, the Diplomatic Correspondent wrote: "For some time it has been known that the German staff plan for an attack on Czechoslovakia, if it had to be put into execution, is based on a swift and intensive bombardment, so terrific that the morale of the population might be broken and the armies surrounded and disorder spread in the Sudetenland by 'legionnaires'. Doubtful whether it would be possible to count on British neutrality, it is reported that Germany has 'earmarked' 1500' planes for employment in possible Anglo-German hostilities. This is the background against which the full Cabinet will meet this morning to determine what further action is possible to avert the risk of war." This may, of course, have been not a real German plan but a preparation for bluff at Berchtesgaden, as the phrase—"if it had to be put into execution"—rather suggests.

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could knock them out. Besides, air attack by itself is unlikely ever to be decisive. What chance had Hitler of beating the coalition quickly on land? Nobody can win a lightning war without attacking, and going on attacking. The Great War showed that a careful attack requires forces superior by at least three to one; the war in Spain showed that this was still true, and even if the first attack were a complete surprise, it would need vast reserves of troops and material on the spot to feed it, to carry it through. It was already late September: if Germany and Italy had not a decisive success within two months of zero hour, they would be in for a long war with their initial stocks and hope spent. What is more, to a quick victory against a well-equipped nation surprise is now almost essential; yet in September, 1938, Hitler had given away the advantage of surprise—so much so<sup>1</sup> that this was one of the strongest reasons for thinking he was bluffing. In September, 1938, Hitler advertised so stridently his intention to attack the Czechs that it looks as if he never had this intention. It looks as if Hitler did not mean to attack the Czechs; his aim was to induce the democracies to let the Czechs down. This, not a lightning war, is the aim to which the methods he chose in 1938 were adapted.

Had Hitler, then, any chance of getting what he wanted by war, if France and Great Britain had stood

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Pierre Cot points out: "Herr Hitler let the Czechoslovak mobilisation go forward in peace; he let France take some very judicious measures of security; he let Mr. Duff Cooper mobilise the British Fleet. . . . Herr Hitler let pass all the time required for us to establish, all along our frontiers, our observers' posts; all the time required for our own bombing squadrons to receive their munitions; all the time required for us to see that we had a year's supply of petrol; all the time required for perceiving that the anti-aircraft defence of Paris was inadequate and . . . for completing it by means of the Navy's anti-aircraft artillery" (*L'Armée de l'Air*, pp. 42, 43; Grasset, 1939, 18 fr.).

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firm? Perhaps one. Germany and Italy, together and centrally placed, would be "on interior lines"—that is, able to switch great forces from one front to another much more quickly than their dispersed opponents. Their strategy would therefore be to concentrate on one front, holding the others as lightly as they could and making a few side-shows or feints to divert large forces of the enemy. Could they not perhaps in this way bring to bear on the exposed Czechs overwhelming forces? Could they not perhaps break in and cut off the Czechs before much help reached them from Russia and before France could gather enough forces to pierce and roll up the Siegfried line? If so, then the anti-totalitarian coalition might fall to pieces, each Power seeking a separate peace at the expense of its allies for fear others might do it first. For Hitler then would already have what he set out to win, and would only have to hold it against costly attacks. In the end his enemies, if they held together, would be bound to win; but it would be a long business, involving massacre and ruin without precedent—the more so if at the start Germany had attacked ruthlessly from the air; and German propaganda, allied to ill-informed pacifists and other elements, would be dividing public opinion in the democratic countries, while in Russia the unrest, of which those purges were the sign, might come to a head. Nobody, therefore, can say for sure that Hitler had no chance of success, especially as there is always "the fortune of war".

But how great was this chance? In England and France many people made the excuse: "Whatever we had done, Czechoslovakia would have been overrun in a few weeks—long before any help from either of us could have reached her". Before and after the crisis

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we even met many people who were surprised to hear that the Czechs never expected to see a French army march into Bohemia after a few weeks or months of war —that what the Czechs expected of the Western Powers was either to deter German aggression by collective resistance or, if war came, to draw off a good many German troops, to let Czechoslovakia take help from Russia without being treated like Republican Spain, and to keep the Poles neutral. This the Western Powers could surely have done, and it would have been enough. Few people in England realised how strong and ready the Czechs were, but the Germans at least took them seriously. In the night of the invasion of Austria, Germany twice asked the Czechs for an assurance that they were not going to mobilise, and the German troops waited for several hours on the Austrian frontier until the Czechs gave the second assurance. People say that after the Germans took Austria the situation of the Czechs was hopeless—not only that they had yet another stretch of frontier with few material aids to defence and with the Germans now on the south as well as the north of their country's narrow waist, but also that they had not fortified it. They had fortified it, not heavily but ingeniously, by September, 1938; meanwhile the Germans had on their side of the Czech-Austrian frontier no serious fortifications and very poor and exposed communications. The Czechs, if the Germans had attacked them, would not simply have sat still and been shelled; they would have counter-attacked at suitable places and moments—perhaps even gaining the line of the Danube from Bratislava to Passau. The shape of Czechoslovakia, long and narrow, was of course a great danger, but it had this advantage: it allowed the Czechs to switch troops quickly from north

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to south and south to north; and for this they were well equipped, with good railways and mechanised or motorised units in plenty. To attack from the air the Czechs were much less vulnerable than the Germans, because a very small proportion of their people lived in towns—except in the Sudeten German districts; they had also dispersed and rebuilt their great industries of war, to make them less vulnerable to any bombardment. They had an up-to-date air force with a large reserve of pilots, plenty of heavy and light artillery, of tanks and of modern anti-aircraft batteries, the latest fortifications<sup>1</sup> and a secret anti-tank gun of surprising power; they had, in dispersed storage, reserves of liquid fuel and raw materials for several months of intense warfare; and they could mobilise thirty-five to forty highly trained and fully equipped divisions. Germany could mobilise, it is said, a hundred and forty divisions and the Italians a doubtful forty. Could France have kept in play enough German and Italian divisions? Almost certainly. The Siegfried line was not (Hitler even said so) ready till December, and its concrete was not dry; General Gamelin even thought the French Army would be through it in a fortnight. If he was wrong, if in modern warfare on land the advantage of the defensive is overwhelming, then so much the better for the Czechs, who would be defending. If bad weather would slow down the Russian troops marching through Roumania, it would also be likely to hinder the German attacks. If the Powers of the Axis were on interior lines, the German railways were already in bad repair and short of rolling-stock. In short, if Great Britain

<sup>1</sup> The Czech Maginot line was designed to resist the shells from guns of 15 cm. calibre, but the Czechs tested it with their 30.5 cm. mortar. A general watched the test from inside the fort that was being shelled. He survived unharmed.

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and France had stood by the Czechs in 1938, Hitler's only chance of winning a war was to finish with the Czechs at once, and it was a very poor chance.

But that is not all. It is not even true that, if war had come, the anti-totalitarian coalition could only have won by making it a long war. The Great War of 1938 might well have been a short war with Hitler the loser. In October, 1938, the Czech troops often came in close contact with the troops of the *Reichswehr* whose business was to take over the Sudeten districts. Again and again we heard this story: German officers had taken Czech officers aside and said, "Why didn't you resist? It would have cost us a year to get through"; sometimes even, "Why didn't you resist? We were only waiting to come over to you." At first we were very sceptical of these stories, but in the end we believed them. They came from many parts of the frontier, from the ranks and from officers, including some whose word and judgment nobody could doubt. The German troops in several districts were well clothed and well equipped; but in others they were clearly armed for an occupation, not for an invasion, and their uniforms were of *Ersatz* stuff, not fit to stand a winter. Many German soldiers looked with open envy at the clothing of the Czech soldiers. The soldiers of the *Reichswehr*, unlike Henlein's *Ordners*, behaved correctly. They even in many cases began by shooting some of the *Ordners* who had beaten up Jews and Socialists or looted shops. In one case they let the Czech soldiers do the shooting (the Henleinist hooligans were in a tower with a machine-gun, and the German soldiers stood beside the Czechs, praising their aim); in another case a German officer said to a Czech, "This is only a beginning: we shall do this in Germany one of these days". There were also

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cases where German officers welcomed Sudeten German Social Democrats into the *Reichswehr*, for Socialists who had had the courage to stand up for the Republic in spite of the Henleinist Terror would clearly make better soldiers than the hooligans of Henlein, whose favourite exploit was to shoot a Czech policeman in the back, batter his head and run away. These facts fit closely in with others that are well known: for instance, that the feud between the German Army and the paramilitary organisations goes very deep, being older than Hitler's Party; that the responsible officers of the German Army were strongly against risking war in 1938; and that almost all the people of Germany were profoundly fearful of war, in contrast to that one inhuman young generation of Germans in whose minds there is nothing except the propaganda of Hitler and Streicher —the nightmare problem for any future liberal Germany. In 1938, after the German Press and Wireless had accused the Czechs of every atrocity, still the Czech Legation in Berlin neither had nor needed a guard. Let us allow largely for the strange fact that, when their country actually plunges into war, people do often fight and die for a régime they detest. Still the World War made ordinary people much more critical of causes for fighting than they have ever been before, and this not only in France and Great Britain but in Germany. For all these reasons, war in 1938 might well have meant revolution in Germany within a few months, after the first German reverses; and German reverses there would have been, the Czech Army could and would have seen to that. The revolution in Germany would not have been a Bolshevik revolution, for how could it be? The organisations of the Left in Germany had been dissolved and discredited. One organisation

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stood ready and respected—the Army. The Great War of 1938, then, if it had come, might well have been short, ending in Hitler's fall and in a relatively moderate régime for Germany, especially if the anti-totalitarian coalition had from the start made to Germany a standing offer of an unvindictive peace.

The facts are complex, but the conclusion is clear. If France and Great Britain had stood by the Czechs in 1938, they could almost certainly have deterred Hitler from attacking Czechoslovakia; for Hitler had almost no hope of winning a war against them, and there are many signs that he never meant to fight them. By letting down the Czechs, France and Great Britain betrayed in advance the aims for which they would have to fight if war in the end should involve them, threw away thirty-five first-rate divisions, a great industry-of-war, a useful air force, a key strategical position, and gave to Germany the chance to gain control of all the food, fuel and minerals of eastern Europe. Germany may fail: in taking Austria and the Sudetenland Germany took liabilities as well as assets, and the Czechs will never forget they once were free. The finances and morale of Germany might break without a war, especially as the one thing that united all Germans, the desire somehow to be free from Versailles, is already achieved, and Hitler has served his initial purpose. The Franco-British ultimatum of September 21st, 1938, definitely set up international anarchy in all Europe and beyond, and in a world so fluid all things are possible, even good things. But nobody ought to base a policy on hopes of happy accidents, and it remains likely that in September, 1938, France and Great Britain destroyed the power, which until Munich they still had, to have peace without selling freedom.

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THE worse-than-wasted sacrifice of the Czechs is an eternal warning. How did things get to such a pitch that it seemed to most people in September, 1938, that a great war would come if Czechoslovakia were not tricked into enslavement? How prevent this from happening again? It is vital to know what forces and what people cause crises which, if the series of them goes on, will enslave us all.

The man most to blame for the Czech tragedy is—strange as it may seem—Adolf Hitler. If modern war is a thing so terrible that to many honest people even the betrayal of Czechoslovakia seems a price well worth paying to put it off, what words are strong enough to condone the crime of threatening war for gain? Yet this is what Hitler did in September, 1938—unless he then knew for certain that, whatever happened, there would be no general war, in which case the crime is not wholly his.

It is strange that there should be any need to say this. But there is. For all through the crisis there were people and papers in England and France pretending that Hitler was in the right and blaming the Czechs. What is more, the British Government and the French Government actually threatened to hold the Czechs—not Hitler—solely responsible for a war that might come if the Czechoslovak Government did not accept,

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without consulting its people or its Parliament, an outrageous demand.<sup>1</sup> After Germany had staged a partial mobilisation and refused arbitration,<sup>2</sup> after Germany had incited the Sudeten Germans to revolt, had sent them arms and had waged a bestial campaign of lies and insults against the Czechs by Press and Wireless, the Governments of two great democracies actually threatened to hold the Czechs solely responsible for a war that might follow! This alone is enough to show that Hitler was not the only criminal; that Great Britain and France condoned his crime if they did not aid it.

Adolf Hitler and his henchmen not only committed a crime, their methods were dirty. In March, 1938, they gave a solemn pledge to abide by the Treaty of Arbitration between Germany and Czechoslovakia, one of the Locarno treaties of 1925 which Germany had freely accepted. Six months later they broke this pledge. In May the official German News Agency reported that an affray at Komotau had caused a hundred casualties, yet "careful inquiries from a neutral source revealed the number to be no more than fifteen".<sup>3</sup> One week-end in July the same German News Agency suddenly announced that the Czech Army was mobilising; we were in Prague and saw not a sign of military movements; a very careful English observer who was wandering in the Sudeten districts at the time also saw none, and in the end Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons that the British Government's observers had reported the news to be false. On August 7th there was a tavern brawl at Höhal, in which Wenzel Bayerle, a Henleinist, was killed by a Social Democrat

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> Or so the British Government suggested; see above, pp. 63-64.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Alfred Zimmern, speaking at Chatham House, June 12th, 1938.

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who was an Austrian refugee; the German Press and Wireless at once, in screaming chorus, declared that it was a Czech who had killed Bayerle "out of national hatred".<sup>1</sup> (The Polish wireless took up this German lie, and many others throughout the crisis.) Again, they accused Bat'a (the famous manufacturer of shoes, the Czech Ford) of being a Jew, although he came of an "Aryan" family that had been Catholic since 1576. On one day, September 16th, 1938, the officially controlled Press and Wireless of the Third Reich assured the world that in Prague there were queues before the provision dealers plundering the shops, that Hausmann, the *Bezirksleiter* of Eger, had been shot by the Czechs, that Czechs tanks were going through Sudeten villages shooting right and left, that the Czechs had put swastikas on some of their lorries to persuade the world that Germany had invaded Czechoslovakia, and that 62 Slovak soldiers had crossed into Germany saying that they would not shoot on Sudeten Germans. All lies, easy to refute: Hausmann, for instance, had simply fled to Germany. On September 22nd, when the Vienna wireless announced that Germans were being attacked and blood was flowing on the Václavské Náměstí in Prague, people ran out into the street to see, and found that nothing had happened. The incident at Moravská Ostrava on September 7th was, in Lord Runciman's judgment, "used in order to provide an excuse for the suspension, if not for the breaking off of negotiations" on the Czech Fourth Plan, and the British Government's observer reported "that the importance of this incident was very much exaggerated".<sup>2</sup> And so on,

<sup>1</sup> There was an honourable exception. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* mentioned that the man who killed Bayerle was not a Czech.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons, September 28th, 1938; Hansard, col. 11.

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and so on. These are only a few examples, so few that they give a very false idea of the stream of lies, unprecedented in time of peace, in which the German Government, through its many organs all under its absolute control, indulged. It even tricked some of its own people into risking their lives: German storm-troopers arrested in Czechoslovakia were astounded to find Czech police still on duty, for in Germany they had been told that the Czechs had handed over the territory. And Hitler personally lied to President Roosevelt, for in his reply to the President's message of September 26th he wrote that "the Prague Government were not willing to recognise the elementary rights of the Sudeten Germans", and that "innumerable dead, thousands of injured, tens of thousands of detained and imprisoned persons, and deserted villages, are the accusing witnesses before the world of the outbreak of a hostility already long apparent on the part of the Prague Government". What contemptible nonsense! Any-one on the spot who was not physically blind could see that Hitler was lying. People who like the fascist powers or find their success magnetic often say that they are brutal perhaps but at least honest and direct, a refreshing contrast to the hypocritical and shifty democracies. That is simply not true. If Hitler too has not dishonoured obligations, dishonoured himself and dishonoured his wretched country, then "honour" and "dishonour" have indeed become words without meaning. The great democracies of Western Europe have soiled themselves, heaven knows, especially by their treachery to the Czechs; but to run to the other extreme, to admire Hitler and Mussolini as straightforward fellows, is madly unrealistic.

There are excuses for Germany's behaviour, though

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not enough to justify it. After the World War the victorious Powers, by putting the Peace Treaties to unjust uses, by going on year after year with the idiocy of reparations, and by evading their engagement to share in disarmament, did a great deal to make inevitable the rise of Hitler and the feeling that gangsterism alone would bring Germany justice. The United States, as well as Great Britain, France and Italy, is to blame, for the United States could have moderated these evils, but stood aloof. But to say that Munich was therefore just is absurd, for how can it be just to visit all these sins upon one small Power and to help the aggressor against an innocent victim? The writings of Fichte, Richard Wagner, Treitschke, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, bear indelible witness that a great deal of Hitlerism existed before Hitler. And can anything justify the crime of threatening twentieth-century war for gain?

Many people would like to put the whole blame for the tragedy of September, 1938, upon the Peace Treaties; for, they say, clearly treaties which so fixed the Czechoslovak frontiers as to include over three million Germans made the whole trouble inevitable. But this is quite untrue. For two good reasons the frontiers of 1919 absolve from responsibility nobody who took part in the events of 1938. In the first place, there was a strong case for those frontiers, as well as against them. The man in the street very naturally asks, "Why did the Peace Treaties so arrange the frontiers of Czechoslovakia as to include nearly three and a half million Germans? Those treaties based themselves—quite rightly—on the 'self-determination of peoples': why, then, did they depart from that principle in this case?" The chief reason was that, if the peace was to have any chance of lasting, it was no good giving to the new

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States such frontiers that they would have no reasonable degree of economic independence and no reasonable chance of being able to defend them. This is clearly still the truth. If there is to be some real chance of avoiding causes of war, any settlement must be a compromise between strict "self-determination of peoples" and what is called "viability"—which means, of course, not that any country should be independent of all intercourse with other nations, but that each country should be able to go on existing without becoming the vassal of some great Power. In Czechoslovakia's case the problem of making a frontier that could be defended against invasion was especially hard, because the land inhabited by the Czechs and Slovaks was long and slender, with no access to the sea. If, in spite of having very long frontiers and no seaboard, Czechoslovakia was to be made reasonably defensible against invasion, it was essential for the frontier dividing Czechoslovakia from Germany to follow the natural line of the mountains. This does not mean that the whole frontier of Bohemia, as the Peace Treaties fixed it, was the best that could be made:<sup>1</sup> a frontier could be drawn giving an independent Czechoslovakia with a million less Germans, and one day this will have to be tried. Masaryk often said of the settlement of 1919 that the problem was, "Which is

<sup>1</sup> Miss Elizabeth Wiskemann writes: "With regard to the various salients which jutted out into Reich German territory, it would, I believe, have been wise to cede them to Germany, especially Egerland with its particular status and traditions and its violent nationalism; indeed the mountain-frontier breaks before the Asch-Eger corner in a fairly convenient fashion, and Rumburg and Friedland are beyond the essential strategic line. It would also, I think, have been better to add some territory in the south to Austria, a suggestion accepted by Masaryk in discussing the future with Dr. Seton-Watson in Holland in the autumn of 1914. . . . The Coolidge Commission, also, advocated both these cessions to Austria, and the cession of the salients to Germany" (*Czechs and Germans*, p. 91; Oxford University Press, 1938, 12s. 6d.).

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the lesser evil? That ten million Czechs and Slovaks be under alien domination, or three million Germans?" To this question the Big Four of Munich gave the confident answer, "The ten million Czechs and Slovaks", and this they called self-determination. The frontier hastily botched at Munich in 1938 was no solution to the problem carefully considered at Paris in 1919:<sup>1</sup> that problem still remains.

And secondly, in judging political causes it is a fallacy to trace them too far back. There is no limit to this tracing back; if the tragic fate of Masaryk's Republic is due to the errors of 1919 and the sins of the next years, these were due to the hatred raised up by the World War, this in turn to the international anarchy that led to that war, and so on to infinity. Of course, it is wretched that much of what is yielded to Hitler was not yielded to a Republican Germany, and certainly things done in 1919 laid up trouble for 1938 just as things done in 1938 may well have laid up trouble for coming generations; in fact "the evil that men do lives after them". But the vital question is what forces were decisive, who and what made this betrayal of Czechoslovakia inevitable or nearly inevitable. That cannot be said of the treaties of 1919, of the failure of the Disarmament Conference, even of the Abyssinian tragedy, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, the Committee for Non-Intervention in Spain, the fall of Austria: as late as February, 1938, even as late as July, there was still time to stop Hitler from capturing Bohemia. One must put into the background the things that are far back, and seek the last acts that made the September disaster inescapable.

<sup>1</sup> On the care taken over the decisions of 1919, see Elizabeth Wiskemann, *op. cit.* p. 89, and the article by M. Tardieu in *Gringoire* for September 23rd, 1938.

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What shares with Hitlerism and who shares with Hitler the decisive, immediate responsibility for the disaster and disgrace of September, 1938?

First, how far were the Czechs themselves to blame? Did they really ill-treat the Sudeten Germans? Here is Lord Runciman's judgment:

Czechoslovak rule in the Sudeten areas for the last twenty years, though not actively oppressive and certainly not "terroristic", has been marked by tactlessness, lack of understanding, petty intolerance and discrimination, to a point where the resentment of the German population was inevitably moving in the direction of revolt. The Sudeten Germans felt, too, that in the past they had been given many promises by the Czechoslovak Government, but that little or no action had followed these promises. This experience had induced an attitude of unveiled mistrust of the leading Czech statesmen.<sup>1</sup>

Except the statement that Sudeten German resentment was moving "inevitably" towards revolt—a statement which does not fit the facts given in our first two chapters—this judgment of Lord Runciman is true. And there is a second charge against the Czechs. An agreement made on February 18th, 1937, between the Czechoslovak Government and the Sudeten German "activist" parties might well, if the Czechs had managed to carry it out quickly, have appeased or largely appeased the Sudeten Germans;<sup>2</sup> but the Czechs

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Chamberlain, dated September 21st, 1938, and published in the British White Paper of September 28th; Cmd. 5847.

<sup>2</sup> Some Henleinists confessed as much. "Acceptance of the *Volksschutzgesetze* and real fulfilment of the promises of February 18th, 1937, would (this we can say to-day) probably have checked the disintegration of the

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did not carry it out in time. It was not an easy thing to carry out, but the failure fatally weakened the activists and strengthened the Henleinists at the decisive time. Who was to blame for the "tactlessness, lack of understanding, petty intolerance and discrimination", and for the Government's promises to the Sudeten Germans not being fully or quickly fulfilled? The Czechoslovak Government was very little to blame, except one or two Right-Wing members of it (chiefly the Ministers of Education and of the Interior) who in 1937 and 1938 used their departments to delay the working of the "February Agreement"; those mostly to blame were chauvinistic local politicians and petty officials—in fact, Czechs who displayed much the same motives as those which won for the Henleinists so much sympathy in some quarters in England.

The wonder is not that the Czechs had their chauvinists, but that they had so few. Compare the relations of Czechs to Sudeten Germans with those between the English and the Irish. Here too was a problem of nationalities in which the ruling nationality would clearly have to make concessions to the other. The English were better placed than the Czechs, since the Irish, unlike the Sudeten Germans, had no imperialist Great Power of the same nationality to back them. The English took over a hundred years to tame their chauvinism enough to make concessions; even Gladstone could not do it, and in the end they were too late. And yet in 1938 many English people waxed self-righteous at the expense of the Czech

Republic. Thank God people were short sighted enough not to accept them" (*Teplitz-Schönauer Anzeiger*, October 10th, 1938). Yet, they can say it to-day.

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because these had not in twenty years completely conquered their chauvinism—the chauvinism of a nation newly freed after a long struggle. Looked at in proportion with the problems and with the records of other nations, the faults of the Czechs hardly seem so huge as to deserve a Munich. Indeed even *The Times*, in its leading article of April 20th, 1938, had to admit:

President Benesh . . . may claim with justice that nowhere on the Continent do minorities enjoy greater freedom than in Czechoslovakia. The Sudeten Germans, within the limits of a mild censorship, have liberty of the Press, of speech and of assembly, and use it freely to criticise the Czechoslovak Government. . . . Czechoslovakia is certainly the most liberal State in Europe apart from the Western democracies and the Scandinavian countries.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the judgment of Lord Runciman, largely true

<sup>1</sup> The same article also admits that the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia had enjoyed "more political rights than their brethren in Hungary itself."

As for the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia, about ten years before the crisis, M. Grybowski, then Polish Minister in Prague, called on Dr. Krofta to ask the Czechoslovak Government to treat its Polish minority less well, because envy of its good treatment was causing unrest in Poland! This did not prevent Poland from later attacking the Czechs and using the Polish minority against them as Hitler was using the Sudeten Germans.

On the morning of January 15th, 1938, the special correspondent of *Le Temps* in Prague telephoned: "The declarations made two days ago in the Polish Diet by M. Beck . . . have caused a certain perturbation in Prague. "It happens that on the same day on which M. Beck was calling the policy of the Czechoslovak Government 'unfriendly' the *Polonia* of Katowica was publishing an article in which M. Jung, spokesman of the Polish minority in its negotiations with the Czechoslovak Government, declared that these negotiations were going on in a real spirit of mutual understanding" (*Le Temps*, January 16th, 1938).

These facts throw a wry light on the "Declaration" attached to the Munich Agreement. (See Cmd. 5848, p. 5.)

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in itself, "becomes false relatively, when people use it as a pretext for crushing Czechoslovakia or for joining the chorus of her detractors".<sup>1</sup> That the Sudeten German problem became the occasion of a disaster was very little the fault of the Czechs; it happened because the whole history of modern Europe is largely a history of the rise of nationalism, because nationalism has become a cause of strife comparable to the sectarianism that tore Europe in the seventeenth century, because nationalism is a disruptive force ready to hand for any new imperialism. In the years that followed Locarno, most of the Sudeten Germans were "activists". Every increase in Sudeten German intransigence answered to an increase in Hitler's power—to that or to some encouragement given to the Henleinists by Czech Agrarians, by the friends of the Nazis in England, by the Runciman Mission. In spite of external intervention there was very nearly, in September, 1938, a real reconciliation between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechs. It was not the Sudeten German problem that stoked up the crisis of September, 1938; it was the crisis that stoked up the Sudeten German problem.

The real wrong done by the Czechs was in having any dealings at all with Henlein. Mr. Chamberlain on September 28th went out of his way to say that one great difficulty, all through the crisis, was Hitler's distrust of Czech promises: why did he not have the common fairness to add that the Czechs also had reason to distrust both Hitler and Henlein? If Hitler was so straightforward as to be a model to Beneš, why did he pledge himself to abide by Locarno, including the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, and then break his word? Why did he in 1936 make a treaty with

<sup>1</sup> Professor Hubert Beuve-Méry, *Politique*, October, 1938.

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Schuschnigg, recognising Austrian independence, only to destroy that independence in 1938, after the police of Vienna had seized documents that proved how he had used the treaty to foment treason in Austria? If Henlein was straightforward, why did he in 1931 declare "war to the death on liberalism" and in 1934 "we shall never abandon liberalism",<sup>1</sup> tell Mr. Churchill in May that his people did not desire to join Germany,<sup>2</sup> and then, in September, incite them to rebel? The Czechs knew that, whenever they could, the Henleinists smuggled arms in from the Third Reich, and that it was from the Reich that Henlein received the money for his journeys to England, although he told his friends in England that he had nothing to do with Hitler or with Germany.<sup>3</sup> Some Czechs also knew that Henlein had acted as go-between between Hitler and a certain Taus, one of the Nazi conspirators in Austria.<sup>4</sup> Those who expected or pressed the Czechs to have any dealings with Henlein were doing a great wrong if they did not mean in the end to stand by the Czechs. But the Czechs also were to blame; for Czech distrust of Henlein was strong enough to help prevent them from making timely concessions to any Sudeten German, but not strong enough to make them, as it should have made them, shut down Henlein's party in March, 1938, and offer the activists generous concessions quickly carried out. The causes of this

<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth Wiskemann, *op. cit.* pp. 201 and 203-4.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Churchill said, on October 5th, 1938, that the municipal elections of May, 1938, in the Sudeten districts "had nothing to do with joining Germany", and added: "When I saw Henlein over here he assured me that was not the desire of his people" (House of Commons, Hansard, col. 364).

<sup>3</sup> See a pamphlet called *Fejich Boj*, or *Ihr Kampf* (Prague, 1937).

<sup>4</sup> This was shown in the documents, seized by the Austrian police in the Teinfaltstrasse in Vienna. For an account of these documents see *Un Pacte avec Hitler*, by Martin Fuchs (Paris, 1938).

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were two: one was that, at some time when Mr. Eden was still British Foreign Secretary, the Czechoslovak Government had been told that, if it could only smooth things down till the autumn of 1938, it would receive support from Great Britain. The other was that the Agrarians and other parties of the Right were playing the game of strengthening Henlein in the hope of strengthening themselves—in the hope, that is, that Henlein would add useful votes to a great “anti-bolshevik” coalition and still let them dominate it. These Agrarians, who had learned so little from the fate of Hugenberg, are appreciably responsible for their country’s tragedy, and it is not without reason that Voskovec and Werich used to represent them as traitors.

So it happened that, as Dr. Ladislav Rašín said in Mr. Beran’s face,

“The Government regarded with a passive air the beginning of the anarchy and chaos in the frontier regions. . . . By allowing the constitution of the *Freiwillige Schutzdienst* (Henlein’s Storm Troops) . . . by watching it usurp in effect the functions of the police, the bases of the rebellion were created. . . . A similar situation began to develop in Slovakia. All those who wished to fight against the unity and integrity of the Czechoslovak State were given freedom to make their journeys abroad—not only the Germans, but also the Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks and Ruthenes—and everywhere they found a friendly welcome and a subsidy for their trouble.”

The Hodža Government resting upon a coalition of parties of which the Agrarians were the largest,

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committed the folly of holding, to please the Germans, the Agrarians and the British, those municipal elections which gave rise to the crisis of May 21st, 1938. The Minister of the Interior was an Agrarian, had always been an Agrarian since 1921, and the Ministry of the Interior was largely staffed by Agrarians; and so on May 12th Herr Jaksch had to appeal in Parliament to this minister to prevent democratic Sudeten Germans being delivered into the hands of the Nazis. Yet again, a few days later, in a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Herr Jaksch told how the Henleinists had attacked a loyalist meeting of Sudeten Germans, how the Czech police had done nothing to check them, and how these police had said, "We can do nothing, for our hands have been tied".<sup>1</sup> The reports of the Ministry of the Interior itself give heart-rending evidence<sup>2</sup> of how again and again in September, 1938, Czech policemen and frontier guards were refused reinforcements, and therefore murdered, in disorders which would never have arisen if the Ministry of the Interior had been firm and prompt. Even as late as September 22nd, when the Hodža Government had fallen and the Syrový Government was not yet formed, Henleinist *Ordners* took possession of several towns behind the line held by the Czechoslovak Army. The Army, fearing to be faced by a German penetration which could not be undone, rang up Prague again and again, but the Ministry of the Interior would do nothing. At last the Army received leave to act, and the Henleinists soon vanished; but in one of these towns, Aussig, the Army arrested the chief of police as a traitor. Finally, and as late as August 1938,

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, May 20th, 1938, dispatch from G. E. R. Gedye.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 95-101 above.

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M. Beran himself actually allowed an English friend to publish in *The Times* that he would be glad to see Henlein a member of the Czechoslovak Government.<sup>1</sup> Blindness, or worse? Perhaps only blindness. But certainly a grave weakness to the Republic in its time of trial, an ally in fact to Hitler.

The Slovaks, too, helped Hitler to enslave them. There is more excuse for them. The history of the Slovaks is quite different from the history of the Czechs. The Czechs had been the first Protestant nation; in the Hussite wars they had routed Germans five times their number, and after three centuries of vassaldom they had won back independence. But the Slovaks were always vassals. They had a fantastic peasant art, but politically they were children. At the end of the war almost the only Slovaks capable of modern life were the Protestants, and they were a mere handful. For the rest the only developed political institution was the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> Masaryk, who came from the country where Slovakia and Moravia join, said to Karel Čapek about his childhood:

“I had nothing to read; I heard of very little; I was not able to travel: that is why the Church was more important than it is to children to-day; it was the only significant building besides the castle; only

<sup>1</sup> This letter appeared in *The Times* of August 25th, 1938, and was from Professor G. E. G. Catlin. M. Beran actually said “that Henlein to date had not chosen to raise any issue of foreign policy”—this four months after Henlein’s Karlsbad demands. M. Beran also said that he “looked forward to Britain and Germany reaching some understanding as the best guarantee of the peace of Europe and the safety of Czechoslovakia, and even to a Four-Power Pact”.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, when Slovak autonomists complained that the Czechs staffed nearly all the schools of Slovakia, the Czechs answered that in 1919 they simply could not find enough Slovaks fit to be teachers. One had only to go to Slovakia to see that this must have been true.

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we could not go into the castle, whereas we used to go to church, and so once a week we saw a building which was larger and airier, which was decorated, where we listened to preaching and music, where we met all the rest of the village. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

That was a long time ago, but between the childhood of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk and the end of the World War life in Slovak villages had hardly changed at all. These people were easy game for the protean penetration of the Nazis and the Magyars, into whose hands the autonomist movement of Father Hlinka played. Slovakia had only twenty years of independence after centuries of serfdom: it was not enough. This is why in 1938 the Slovaks fell into fascism while the Czechs stayed humane. Even then not all the Slovaks behaved like depraved children. They showed in the mobilisation that most of them were loyal to their liberators the Czechs—even Sidor was frightened of what he had done;<sup>2</sup> and in the elections of 1938 Father Hlinka had gained only a third of their votes, even though he was personally magnetic, had in the past braved Hungarian prisons in the cause of their freedom, and was using the vague, seductive slogan of autonomy. So in Slovakia, too, as in many other countries, the people was largely guiltless of the disaster of 1938: the guilt lay mainly with Right-Wing political groups, so keen on privileges as to lose sight even of patriotism.

As for the Sudeten Germans themselves, only their Socialists are free from immediate blame. As soon as Hitler took Austria, the two Right-Wing activist parties (the German Agrarians and the German

<sup>1</sup> President Masaryk tells his story, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 107.

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Catholics) rushed to join Henlein.<sup>1</sup> Apart from cowardice and hysteria, many of them thought—or tried to think—that, united with the Henleinists in one block, they could bargain better with the Czechs and get the most generous settlement possible within the Republic; but why did they not see that Henlein would not stop there, that Hitler would not let him? A very great many of the Sudeten Germans, even of Henlein's party, had no wish to join the Reich, and Henlein deceived them; but why were they deceived so easily? They have been cruelly punished, but they at least paid for their own errors.

Did anything or anyone else in Czechoslovakia itself help to make the tragedy of 1938 inevitable? At first sight it seems as if the whole foreign policy of Beneš—the policy of doing everything to make a reality of the League of Nations and reinsuring his country by the Little Entente, by an alliance with France and by an alliance with Russia—was a proven failure and a cause of the disaster. But is this true? Is there any other policy that could have given so good a chance of an independent Czechoslovakia and a peaceful Europe? Anyone who desires the self-determination of peoples—and those who carved up Czechoslovakia professed this principle—must agree that this is hollow unless it means that small nations shall have real independence—have the chance, if they have the wish to live as democracies among dictatorships. But how can this be realised? Perhaps only in a world where there really is collective security against aggression. Failing this, a small

<sup>1</sup> Just after the invasion of Austria we were in Český Krumlov (Böhmisches Krumau), and there we heard a leader of the German Agrarians explaining to the local leaders why the party had joined Henlein. He seemed very worried and unconvinced, and so did his audience.

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nation can only hope to keep its independence if it has a guarantee or an alliance. Of course neither of these is sure; but an alliance is less likely to be broken than a guarantee; for in an alliance the small nation is not simply passive, a strategical asset, but also an active ally and so doubly worth keeping. With which Great Power could the Czechs have allied themselves? Germany after the World War was weak and unstable, after 1933 tyrannical and adventurous. A Slavonic federation of Eastern Europe was in those twenty years never practical politics: one day it may be. France was the ideal ally for the Czechs, not only because in the things of the spirit the Czechs looked very much to France, but also because France badly needed the Czechs. Nobody can blame Beneš for not reckoning with the suicide of France. After Munich many Czechs complained that Beneš, all through 1938, received warnings from the Czechoslovak legations in Paris and in London that France and Great Britain were likely to let Czechoslovakia down, and that he disregarded these warnings and failed to make terms with Germany in time.<sup>1</sup> Beneš, of course, received many warnings, and did not disregard them. But what could he do?

<sup>1</sup> One of these accusers was M. Osuský, Czechoslovak Minister in Paris. After Munich he appeared in Prague, accused people in Prague of ignoring warnings sent by him, and demanded an inquiry. (The Agrarian Press made great play with this demand.) We went into this question and found that in Paris, all through 1938 down to the visit of Mr. Chamberlain to Berchtesgaden, M. Osuský had held frequent Press conferences with the Paris correspondents of Czechoslovak newspapers. At these Press conferences he was often highly indiscreet, yet he never once suggested that in his view France might not honour her alliance with Czechoslovakia. He even told journalists that he had converted M. Flandin to the view that France must stand by the Czechs, simply because he and M. Flandin belonged to a wine-tasting club, the "Chevallerie des Tastevins", and had been hearty together one evening. Of M. Bonnet he said, "C'est mon camarade". He did of course warn Prague, but we gather that his warnings alternated with reassuring messages.

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Make terms with Germany? What terms? Schuschnigg in 1936 made an agreement with Germany: it did not save his country. And in coming to illusory terms with Hitler's Germany, Beneš would have thrown away the one asset which, if the Czechs did not throw it away, nothing could take away from them: the fact that they chose to be betrayed rather than to betray. If it had been the Czechs who left the French, not the French who left the Czechs, Czechoslovakia would have fallen to Hitler none the less, as Austria fell in spite of a treaty with Hitler, but would have lost also her impregnable moral claim to be restored to real independence. In spite of Munich, then, the policy of Beneš was the right policy for his country, indeed for Europe.

But in two respects Czechoslovakia's foreign policy was at fault. First, President Beneš for a long time thought that Czechoslovakia must surrender if France and Great Britain should desert her, and maybe he was right, but he was wrong to say so. He said so, for instance, to Mr. Bruce Lockhart in April, 1938,<sup>1</sup> and in December, 1937, to the correspondent of a British newspaper, so that many people must have known what he intended. This was a clear hint to the Nazis and to the Cliveden Set that all they need do was to seduce France and divide England—they could then rely on a Czechoslovak surrender. This may well have done great damage. Secondly, the Czechs neglected propaganda. They were by nature bad at it, and few of them tried to be good at it. They had a strong and interesting case, but they disdained to put it. They relied upon its truth and would not see that they had to compete with attractive liars. They would not, for example, spend enough on their Legation in London;

<sup>1</sup> See *Guns or Butter*, by Bruce Lockhart.

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their tourist agency, Čedok, was rude and inefficient; so were many of their customs officials. Each of such things is trivial in itself, but together they did a great deal to make public opinion in Great Britain less ready to protest against the Anglo-French Plan. The Czechs were the more foolish to neglect propaganda because Hungary, Poland and even Nazi Germany were able to use as instruments for their propaganda old aristocracies. These exerted, especially in Great Britain, an influence out of all proportion to the merits of their own countries, because the real rulers of Great Britain were a privileged and class-conscious oligarchy. When Masaryk said to Čapek, "democracy—modern democracy—is in its infancy", he added: "It would be a mistake to shut our eyes to the adherents and exponents of the old aristocratic and monarchic order of things who are also at work". The Czechs ignored this warning, and so helped to make it possible to betray their country.

In short, in Czechoslovakia itself there were some people and forces that bear an appreciable share of responsibility for the disaster that fell upon their country and upon all who aspire to freedom, and yet relatively the Czech responsibility is very small: if the faults of the Czechs had been the only faults outside Germany in 1938, there would have been no threat to peace or to freedom. Who else is to blame? Poland and Hungary? They were predatory and dishonest, but whatever they did depended on France and Great Britain. And Russia? The "purging" did a great deal to make worse the general situation and so to strengthen Hitler and all his friends; but all through 1938 Russia's policy towards Europe was loyal and correct. The conclusion is inescapable: the countries that share with Hitler the

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heaviest responsibility for the tragedy which began in September, 1938, are France and Great Britain.

France had with Czechoslovakia a definite treaty, binding each of the two Powers to help the other against attack. If any document is ever worth anything, this treaty was binding. It was signed on October 16th, 1925, and because nearly thirteen years had gone by since then, some people suggested that changes of circumstances—the rearmament of Germany, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and the invasion of Austria—had by 1938 made it no longer binding because no longer possible to carry out. But this is wholly untrue, and for two reasons: first, General Gamelin, Chief of the French General Staff, reported in September, 1938, that France could, and for her own sake should, fight for the Czechs, if the Germans were to attack them; and secondly, the pledge France made to the Czechs in 1925 was still binding in September, 1938, for the simple reason that the French Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had just renewed it. On July 12th, at a banquet in Paris, M. Daladier said: “our solemn engagements with Czechoslovakia are, for us, inescapable and sacred”.<sup>1</sup> On September 4th, commemorating the entry of the United States into the World War and with the Ambassador of the United States present, M. Bonnet spoke of the “gravity of the Czechoslovak problem”, and added: “France, in any case, will remain faithful to the pacts and treaties she has concluded. She will remain faithful to the engagements she has undertaken.”<sup>2</sup> So without question France was legally bound, and therefore morally bound, to help the Czechs in 1938. The moral obligation went further still,

<sup>1</sup> *Le Temps*, July 14th, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Temps*, September 5th, 1938.

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because again and again France had used, sometimes abused, the alliance, in order to extract from Czechoslovakia diplomatic support against other countries, and because the alliance had always been unpopular in London.<sup>1</sup> If, then, Czechoslovakia's relations with other Powers than France, and especially with Germany, Hungary and Great Britain, were not satisfactory, the fault was largely in France. France had taken the profits, and France should never have left the Czechs alone to pay the costs.<sup>2</sup> France took all she could get out of the Czechs, and then, when it seemed she might have to give something in return, even though it was still in her own interest as well as in the Czech interest for her to give it, she let them down. If there is any such thing as national honour, the French nation sold its honour in 1938. It dealt the severest blow that could have been dealt to the sanctity of treaties, without which any lasting peace is most unlikely. And it reduced itself to a third-class Power, a dependency of Great Britain or of Germany. Why did it do all this? What forces caused this treachery?

For fearing and hating war, for going wild with unreckoning relief when war seemed to have been put off,

<sup>1</sup> Indeed it was France, not Czechoslovakia, that first asked for the alliance.

<sup>2</sup> Also some members of the French Government have an especially heavy moral responsibility. Wenzel Jaksch, leader of the Sudeten German Social Democrats, visiting Paris in April, 1938, asked them if he could rely on France standing by Czechoslovakia. He must know definitely, he said, because he was prepared to lead his people into a terrible fight, but not to a mere slaughter, hopeless and purposeless. In reply, "These Excellencies lavished upon their new friend assurances of sympathy and admiration, promises and encouragements. 'He could carry on his hard struggle in all confidence. . . . Never would France tolerate a fresh German aggression in Central Europe and especially not against Czechoslovakia.' Jaksch believed them and left, reassured. To-day this brave leader is haunted by the fate of the emigrants or the persecuted." (See the account by Professor Beauve-Méry in *Politique* for November, 1938.)

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nobody can cast a stone at the French people, which had had its own country invaded and devastated twice within living memory and still, with joyous heroism, responded to the mobilisation. The ordinary people of France were not only morally almost guiltless: they had also little or no influence on the decisions taken by M. Daladier in London on September 18th and then at Munich. Of this there is striking evidence: one of the men who flew with M. Daladier back from Munich says that M. Daladier, when he looked down and saw the vast crowd waiting at the aerodrome of Le Bourget, was clearly afraid that it was a hostile, not a welcoming, crowd. It was not, then, any existing demand of the French people for peace at any price that made M. Daladier sell the Czechs. The cause was somewhere else, not in the ordinary people.

How much did the recurrent crisis of French internal politics do to precipitate the betrayal of Czechoslovakia? M. Chautemps staged a Cabinet crisis on March 10th, just in time to help Hitler take Austria; and the bitter struggle over the nationalisation of many factories making armaments and over the forty-hour week seems to have brought France's supplies of modern aircraft very low. In August an officer of the French Air Force, General Vuillaumin, visited Germany, where aircraft and factories were shown to him, enough to send him back to France "terrified": so a Czech official heard from a friend in the French Legation in Prague, who "explained the hesitations of France . . . by the deficiencies of the air force and by the fear of a bombardment of Paris".<sup>1</sup> And yet General Vuillaumin's report did not sway General Gamelin, the most responsible military authority in France. It is even very doubtful

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I, Document B.

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whether it was decisive with M. Daladier, for in spite of it, in answer to the demands of Godesberg, he and Mr. Chamberlain threatened Hitler with war. This at least is clear: either Daladier and Chamberlain were bluffing, or the defects of the French Air Force and the vulnerability of London and Paris were not enough to compel France and Great Britain to make peace at any price.

There are evidences that there was, among those who ruled France, an incredible ignorance of Czechoslovak affairs. Take M. Daladier's own description of the meeting in London on September 18th, the meeting at which he and M. Bonnet and Mr. Chamberlain decided on the Anglo-French Plan and on the "pressing friendly advice" they would give to President Beneš.

"We bent", said M. Daladier, "over the maps. The British Government made known to us the opinions of Lord Runciman. Need I tell you with what emotion we learnt that in his soul and conscience the English observer concluded that it was impossible to make the Czechs and the Sudetens live together any longer, when all our efforts had consisted in making Czechoslovakia evolve towards a federalism which would have assured the integrity of her territory."<sup>1</sup>

If Lord Runciman's judgment was wrong, as the evidence we have brought forward strongly suggests, why did M. Daladier not challenge it? If it was right, why did it surprise M. Daladier? Why, when France had a Legation in Prague and a military mission, did the French Government have to base a decision involving the fate of the whole system of alliances by which for twenty years France had tried to counterbalance Ger-

<sup>1</sup> Speech to the Chamber of Deputies and to the Senate, October 4th, 1938.

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many's greater man-power and industry, on the judgment of a foreigner, a man who hardly knew the country concerned? And even at Munich, we are told on good authority, the French delegation had not proper maps and had never heard of that trap, the census of 1910. This is not the sort of ignorance that excuses, it is the sort that needs excusing.

But there is worse than ignorance to record. Well in advance of the betrayal there were people busy preparing it by misleading public opinion in France. Already on April 12th, 1938, *Le Temps* published an article by M. Barthélemy, an eminent jurist, not simply urging that France should not plunge into a modern war for the Czechs, but whipping up prejudice against the Czechs without scruple—by the lie, for instance, that Czechoslovakia's trade with Germany and Austria was two-thirds of her total trade! He did not languish for lack of imitators. And during September itself a very great part of the French Press twisted and damped down pieces of news that might shake M. Bonnet and M. Daladier.<sup>1</sup> M. Daladier not only, like Mr. Chamberlain, refused to call Parliament until he could present to it a *fait accompli*, he also (not being blessed, like Mr. Chamberlain, with an "Inner Cabinet" of which every member, except perhaps one, was in advance not unready to betray the Czechs) deceived certain members of his Cabinet and broke his promises to them. On the evening of September 17th, M.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the dispatch of Havas from Prague giving the Czech reply of September 21st—that reply which accepted the Anglo-French plan under duress and on conditions—was falsified in Paris, all reference to pressure being cut out. The Havas news agency in Paris refused again and again to use the true report that General Faucher had resigned from the French Army in protest against his Government's dishonourable action. And a dispatch of Havas from Bucarest, stating on good authority that Roumania would help the Czechs, was suppressed.

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Reynaud and M. Campinchi, when they heard that M. Daladier was going to London next day, were furious because, at the last meeting of the Cabinet, M. Daladier had promised them not to take any decision nor to undertake any negotiation without first having consulted the Cabinet. On September 19th, these and other French Ministers, faced with the Anglo-French plan, wished to resign. They did not resign, not wishing to cause a Cabinet crisis just when war and peace seemed to be in the balance; but they did stipulate that the Czechoslovak Government be clearly told that, even if it felt it must reject the Anglo-French plan, the alliance between France and Czechoslovakia would remain in force. And yet the French and British Ministers in Prague threatened on September 20th and 21st to leave the Czechs in the lurch and to hold them solely responsible for any war that might follow if they should not accept the plan at once! Again, so the Paris correspondent of *The Times* had strong reason for believing, M. Bonnet withheld from the French Cabinet information which showed that Russia was ready to carry out her engagements to France and to Czechoslovakia.<sup>1</sup>

That France betrayed her ally was not the fault of her General Staff. General Gamelin made to his Government a full report on the question whether France could effectively help the Czechs—a balanced review of the case for and against, taking fully into account the strategical difficulties and the inferiority of the French air force, yet advising strongly that France could and should aid the Czechs, and suggesting how. In London M. Bonnet read out the case against helping the Czechs, and left out the case for. (General Gamelin

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, September 23rd, 1938.

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himself told this to an eminent French deputy of the Right.)<sup>1</sup>

Most curious of all, when the news reached Paris that the British Foreign Office had stated in a *communiqué* that "if in spite of all the efforts of the Prime Minister a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France", many French newspapers denounced it as a forgery, and some went further still: the *Action Française* reported that M. Bonnet, asked if it was authentic, said he had not received any confirmation, and *La Liberté* reported M. Daladier as saying that the *communiqué* came "from an official of no importance". As Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong has pointed out, "Bonnet held in his hands the pledge which Poincaré and Viviani had needs do without in reaching their fateful decision in August, 1914—a pledge which at that time might even have averted the World War" and none the less "defeatist rumours calling the statement untrue were permitted to circulate through large sections of the French Press without . . . adequate contradiction".<sup>2</sup> Why? Why? "Historians will speculate", says Mr. Armstrong, "as to the manner in which a Poincaré would have used that categorical pledge, even at this eleventh hour, to line up . . . so solid a coalition of powers . . . as would have thrown Mussolini back into neutrality and called Hitler's bluff."<sup>3</sup> Historians will also inquire, and perhaps find out for certain, why, if

<sup>1</sup> During the hectic days of September, M. Daladier did not call a single meeting of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* or of the *Conseil de la Défense Nationale*.

<sup>2</sup> *When There is No Peace* (Macmillan, New York, 1939), pp. 95, 97.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 99.

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the whole business of the British pledge and Hitler's ultimatum was not one concerted bluff in which the real menace was against freedom and not against peace, this chance was thrown away.

Finally—although this is not in itself a cause of the betrayal, it is a sign of one of these causes and a very sad sign—after the treaty of Munich and before the debate on it, many of the visitors who came to the Czechoslovak Legation in Paris were French senators and deputies, offering their votes for cash.

There is an excuse made in France for the betrayal of Czechoslovakia, a very strong excuse. In the months that followed the Conference of Munich, M. Bonnet claimed that, if France had applied to the Czechs pressure amounting to an ultimatum, this was done in response to a request from the Czechoslovak Government, and in support he showed to his friends what seemed to be a telegram sent to the Quai d'Orsay on the night of September 20th by the French Minister in Prague, saying that the Czechoslovak Government and General Staff were asking that an ultimatum be applied to them, because without it they could not hope to persuade the Czech people to surrender. Not even M. Bonnet pretends that any responsible Czech asked France to dishonour her alliance: only that, after France had joined Great Britain in proposing to her ally a disabling dismemberment, some Czechs asked France at least to take open responsibility for making their country have to give in, so that they might have some chance of carrying out the surrender without a civil war. Is even this true? We know two facts: one is that M. Bonnet's document exists, the other is that President Beneš himself neither made nor authorised the request it contains. Therefore,

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either the document is a forgery, or something of this sort happened: Dr. Hodža, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, requested the ultimatum, and then, when the French Minister asked if President Beneš had agreed to the request being made, answered untruthfully, "Yes". Neither can be ruled out. But it does not matter much; for the telegram is supposed to have been sent in the night of September 20th, and already, at 5 P.M. on the 20th, the French and British Ministers had threatened the Czechs with desertion. Even if some Czechs did ask for a definite ultimatum, this cannot absolve France from the charge of treaty-breaking.

Nothing can absolve Great Britain from the charge of doing everything to make France break her alliance and leave the Czechs alone to face Hitler. Although Great Britain, unlike France, had no special treaty of alliance with the Czechs, Great Britain had signed, together with the Czechs, the Covenant of the League of Nations. Circumstances had indeed changed since then—so much so that by 1938 they had made part of that Covenant very hard to execute. But not the whole of it. The Covenant bound those who signed it to "respect and preserve against aggression the territorial integrity and independence" of its members, including Czechoslovakia. To *defend* against aggression the territorial integrity and independence of every member of the League was never easy; but nobody can say it was impossible to *respect* them. Clearly, then, Great Britain was bound still to respect Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity and independence, and this legal obligation Great Britain broke,<sup>1</sup> carving up the territory and ending

<sup>1</sup> Before the World War there was an Anglo-German scheme for appeasing Germany by dividing up the colonies of Portugal, a country with which

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the independence of a loyal member of the League, a country that had supported Great Britain with many sacrifices in the Abyssinian crisis. And that is not all. The man who lures another man into breaking his word is himself guilty of breaking that word, even though it was not his; at least no Christian would deny this. In 1938 Great Britain schemed to make France break her sacred engagement to the Czechs and is therefore guilty, at least as much as France, of that perfidy. By doing so, Great Britain, too, struck a blow at the sanctity of treaties—an insidious blow whose consequences must ramify through many generations. The fate of the Czechs is a warning to all who make treaties: a warning not only that an ally may break even a treaty that is plainly in the vital interests of both parties, but also that another Power may manœuvre that ally into breaking the treaty and call this “saving peace”.

On September 18th, 1938, when Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier agreed on the partition of Czechoslovakia, “The representatives of the two Governments were guided”, so Mr. Chamberlain frankly explained, “by a desire to find a solution which would not bring about a European war, and, therefore, a solution which would not automatically compel France to take action in accordance with her obligations”.<sup>1</sup> There is the

Great Britain had an alliance. Lord Carnock, then Sir Arthur Nicolson and Permanent Under-Secretary of the British Foreign Office, was disgusted at this deal, although he was a realistic and experienced diplomatist. “I do not see how,” he wrote, “on grounds of political honesty and equity, you can partition with another Power these possessions which you have yourself engaged to defend and maintain intact” (*Lord Carnock*, by Harold Nicolson). The parallel is not very inexact.

<sup>1</sup> September 28th, 1938, in the House of Commons: Hansard, col. 16. Why those words “and therefore”? The alliance between France and Czechoslovakia was designed precisely to prevent a European war by deterring aggression, and to break this alliance was not the only way of avoiding war—it may indeed prove to have done a great deal to make war unavoidable.

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perfidy, confessed without shame. On September 18th, 1938, it was a concerted perfidy; but this was new. Most of the preparing for it was done in Great Britain and in Germany, in marvellous harmony. How much earlier it had begun we do not know. What is certain is that on February 22nd, 1938, Mr. Chamberlain trumpeted out that "the League as constituted to-day is unable to provide collective security for anybody".<sup>1</sup> This, with the resignation of Mr. Eden,<sup>2</sup> gave Hitler a clear hint that he would "get all essentials without war" and with very little delay: the German Press rejoiced that Chamberlain had smashed Geneva, and Hitler's invasion of Austria followed quickly. And there was another clear sign that Mr. Chamberlain already intended to sell the Czechs. On March 7th, 1938, he at last admitted that the most vital part of British rearmament must be home-front defence: "our main strength lies", he said, "in the resources of man power, productive capacity and endurance of this country, and unless these can be maintained . . . in the early stages of war, when they will be the subject of continuous attack, our defeat will be certain whatever might be the fate in secondary spheres elsewhere".<sup>3</sup> And yet the British Government made no special effort to speed up home-front defence, and this although it knew already—everybody knew, and Hitler had said so on February 20th—that the Czechoslovak crisis might come soon. In September Great Britain had a superb navy but still less than forty up-to-date anti-aircraft guns to defend the whole of

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, col. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Resigning, Mr. Eden told the House of Commons that "within the last few weeks, upon one most important decision of foreign policy which did not concern Italy at all, the difference between him and the Prime Minister" was fundamental (February 21st, Hansard, cols. 48-9).

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, col. 1563.

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South-east England. Would any British Government have left this glaring gap and taken this mortal risk if it had not decided to sell the Czechs?

On April 28th, in London, Chamberlain offered to Daladier and Bonnet the bribe for deserting the Czechs—a close military collaboration between Great Britain and France. Although at this stage—four days after Henlein, backed by the Press of the Third Reich, had put forward the Karlsbad demands—the British and French Governments agreed to urge the Czechs to make to the Sudeten Germans no more than the utmost concessions possible within the framework of the Czechoslovak Constitution, there is evidence that Chamberlain himself already did not mean to respect those limits. Early in May the diplomatic correspondent of a leading London newspaper told a high Czech official whom we know: “I am terribly sorry for you Czechs—it’s all been fixed up”. In May, also, Lady Astor gave a luncheon which the Prime Minister attended, “the object being”, as she explained later, “to enable some American journalists who had not previously met him to do so privately and informally, and thus to make his acquaintance”.<sup>1</sup> What did Mr. Chamberlain tell them at this lunch? One of them at once published his impressions. They were “that the British do not expect to fight for Czechoslovakia and do not anticipate that France or Russia will either”, that therefore “the Czechs must accede to the German demands, if reasonable”, and that Mr. Chamberlain already thought the partition of Czechoslovakia a reasonable German demand. “Instead of cantonalisation,” Mr. Chamberlain said in substance, “frontier revision might be advisable. . . . A smaller but

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, June 27th, 1938: Hansard, col. 1540.

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sounder Czechoslovakia would result.”<sup>1</sup> So, even before sending the Runciman Mission to Prague, Chamberlain was ready to press the Czechs to give up their natural frontiers, and Hitler knew it.

Meanwhile the Czechs were doing their level best to settle quickly with the Sudeten Germans and with their other minorities. President Beneš, by almost super-human efforts, united all the parties supporting the Government behind what was the most generous proposal ever made by a Government to minorities—the so-called Nationalities Statute. “We hope”, said Dr. Krofta, the Foreign Secretary, “that an agreement will come; but we intend to give to the minorities in any case the Statute we are preparing for them. We shall give them very substantial concessions, whatever the result of the conversations with some of the parties in which they are grouped.”<sup>2</sup> Why did the Czechs decide to do this—to pass the concessions into law whether the Henleinist leaders, the Slovak Autonomists and Dr. Goebbels pronounced them satisfactory or no? Largely because the British Government was pressing the Czechs all the time to hurry;<sup>3</sup> the Germans became very worried; the Czechs might deprive them of every semblance of a pretext for a threat of invasion. Therefore, in the second week of July, the Press of the Third Reich protested fiercely and even suggested that Great Britain intervene to stop the Czechs from putting the Nationalities Statute before Parliament without more negotiations. The British Government fell in with this suggestion. It suddenly stopped hustling the Czechs

<sup>1</sup> *New York Herald-Tribune*, May 15th, 1938, dispatch from Mr. Joseph Driscoll.

<sup>2</sup> Interview published in *Paris-Soir*, July 14th, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Seton-Watson, who was in Prague early in July, bears witness of this, and so do we.

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and started delaying them. It sent out the Runciman Mission. The British Government, in July, 1938, prevented the Czechs from themselves giving to their minorities, before the crisis began, a settlement which all reasonable people would find fair, and from taking their stand on that settlement.

But did not Mr. Chamberlain tell the House of Commons that the Czechs themselves asked for the Runciman Mission to be sent? He did, and we as English people profoundly wish he had not. The Runciman Mission was not only not sent, as Mr. Chamberlain stated, "in response to a request" from the Czechoslovak Government; it was even sent against the Czechoslovak Government's will. Lord Halifax, before going to Paris with the King and Queen, offered the Czechs a British adviser and threatened that if they should not accept this offer, it and their refusal would be published. What could the Czechs do but welcome the Mission? This was the first of the ultimata sent by Chamberlain's Government to the Czechs.<sup>1</sup> Like the later ones, it was concealed from the British Parliament and people.

The very sending of the Runciman Mission was an invitation to Hitler and the Henleinists to be intransigent. Lord Runciman himself gratuitously reinforced that invitation to intransigence by spending most of his week-ends with disloyal German aristocrats. Who were these people? In *Le Temps* on August 28th the Prague correspondent wrote that, after a series of secret meetings, the big land-owners among the Germans of Czechoslovakia had decided to give their support to

<sup>1</sup> And already even the customary courtesies were lacking; the Czechoslovak Legation in London was not informed of the decision—not until it had the news from Prague, and Prague had had it from the Quai d'Orsay.

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Henlein's party, on condition that Henlein should put into his programme a promise that the land taken from them by the Czechoslovak Land Reform should be restored to them and damages also be paid to them by the State. The leader of these land-owners was Prince Max von Hohenlohe, an unconcealed Nazi. It was at his castle that, on August 18th, Lord Runciman first met Henlein. If anyone doubts that Lord Runciman's one-sided choice of hosts encouraged Sudeten German extremists, here is their own triumphant testimony: "We know", says the *Teplitz-Schönauer Anzeiger* of October 10th, 1938, in its special number welcoming the German troops, "that Lord Runciman first of all sought out the representatives of the German nobility and from them received the enlightenment which he passed on to England and France."

Of what "enlightenment" Lord Runciman passed on to England and France his letter to Chamberlain, published in the White Paper of September 28th, is no doubt a truthful record, even though the date of that letter is September 21st, when it could serve no purpose except to excuse a *fait accompli*. Although he admitted that it was the Henleinist extremists and their foreign backers who had smashed the negotiations on purpose at a moment when the peace of the world seemed in danger, he rewarded them for this by proposing that they be given all they wanted. Although he admitted that the Czechoslovak Government had proposed concessions which were "favourable and hopeful"—indeed even "embodied almost all the requirements of the Karlsbad 8 points"—he rewarded the Czechs for this extreme sacrifice, which involved the highest discipline and grave risks, by proposing that they be deprived "promptly" of a great part of their country, and even

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then compelled to suppress freedom of speech, to include "a representative of the Sudeten German people" in their Government and to submit their foreign policy to the will of their "neighbours". As Mr. Armstrong points out, "the Germans remaining in Czechoslovakia, a country whose twenty-year record for the treatment of minorities was the best in Europe, were much on his mind. But for almost a million Czechs, German liberals and 'race enemies' whom he recommended delivering over to Hitler, whose record for ferocious mistreatment of every opponent, active or passive, is without modern parallel, not a thought, not a line, not a word."<sup>1</sup> He also proposed that the Czech police be at once withdrawn from the frontier districts, leaving Henlein's *Ordners* and his armed legions that were massed across the frontier free to persecute the non-Nazi population and to cause disorders which Hitler could have used as a pretext for invasion.<sup>2</sup> The proposals of Lord Runciman were so flagrantly unjust and inhumane and undemocratic that there can be only one excuse for them, the fear of war. But Lord Runciman's business was to mediate, not to arbitrate, or so the Czechs and the British Parliament were expressly told; and to put forward ruthlessly one-sided proposals is not mediation. Lord Runciman's proposals were such that no Czechoslovak Government could accept them except under the most brutal pressure, and this he must have known. Another broken pledge.

But Lord Runciman seems to have been only a tool. In the first place, even he recommended not what Chamberlain tortured the Czechs into accepting—the cession of all frontier districts where more than half the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> See the first-hand evidence assembled above, in Part I, Chapters I and II.

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people were German—but only the cession of “those frontier districts . . . where the Sudeten population is *in an important majority*”.<sup>1</sup> (There is a rumour, worth mentioning, that Lord Runciman suffered something like a break-down when he realised to what use Mr. Chamberlain was putting his main proposal.) Secondly, Czechs who took part in the negotiations say that again and again, whenever they reached an agreement with the Runciman Mission, Downing Street at once went a step beyond it—a step towards Hitler. Thirdly, on September 7th the leading article of *The Times*, by proposing openly that the Czechs be pressed to cede territory to Germany, and this when the “Fourth Plan” hung in the balance, wrecked that chance of really settling the Sudeten German problem and gave to Hitler, Henlein, the Poles and the Hungarians a plain invitation to grab what they could.

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We have traced the main responsibility for the apparent dilemma of September, 1938, country by country; but what we have found is that the real cause is a set of forces existing in many countries, together with one man able and many anxious to exploit them. Chamberlain seems, all through 1938, to have lived in the nineteenth century—to have acted, that is, on the belief that if only the Great Powers could agree to divide the world into spheres of influence, one sphere of influence for each Great Power and no trespassing, there would be no major clashes of interests and therefore no war: this, it seems, is why he went obstinately on handing over human beings to Hitler’s mercy and

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5847, p. 6. Our italics. See also Mr. Chamberlain’s speech of September 28th, 1938.

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material assets to his use. His doom-laden mistake was that he failed to see that Hitler was not the man to be content with one sphere of influence allotted by a compromise. Hitler's declared aim was simply to make Germany strong—strong enough to dictate to the world and to expand in any sphere of influence she might choose. To this Napoleonic design Hitler brought up-to-date methods. He used force, but he used it not for fighting but for persuasion of a certain kind. He used force to rouse and control four great emotions—love of peace, parochialism, nationalism and anti-communism.

By 1938 everyone knew that science had made war more terrible than ever before—everyone was afraid of bombing from the air, especially in island-minded England, and a very great many people thought of war as the Great Unknown, as the end of the way of life they knew. But love of peace was more even than fear of war. People felt “that war is uncivilised and useless anyhow”.<sup>1</sup> Some of these failings are noble and all are sensible—but they were easy to exploit, because “people thought peace was something to be eulogised and invoked, not something to be purchased by the assumption of real international responsibilities”.<sup>2</sup> This desire for peace, Hitler exploited to Germany's benefit, and so did Chamberlain. He also exploited parochialism—the fact that people tend only to fight for what is called their own, not for other things, even if these are in fact vital to them. Again and again Hitler threatened to raise the question of colonies, then dropped it in return for British passivity in Central Europe; and he used the Anglo-German naval agree-

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *op. cit.* p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

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ment to divide Great Britain from Europe. France was seduced from her Czech alliance by British military collaboration, and then consoled for its loss by a sudden rediscovery of her Empire. And Chamberlain did Hitler signal service by telling the British people that the German threat to Czechoslovakia was only "a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing". As for nationalism, ever since the French Revolution liberal and conservative forces alike have fed and used it, until it has become a terrific explosive force ready for any aggressor; and every device which small nations have used to become free Hitler uses to make a great nation tyrannical.

These facts explain why Chamberlain and Daladier could in 1938 put across their dishonourable and dangerous surrender of the Czechs among their own peoples. But even they do not wholly explain why Chamberlain adopted the policy of undermining the Czechoslovak Republic, and they do not explain what gave Chamberlain the power to make Beneš yield. The underlying cause of the Czechoslovak disaster was the fear of Bolshevism, which was in 1938 the strongest political force in the whole world and the most dangerous.

This is, of course, easy to say and difficult to prove; yet to leave it out is to give a false idea of what really happened in 1938 and of what endangers liberty. Many small things point to its power; for instance, when a Sudeten German Social Democrat visited London in July, 1938, Lord Noel-Buxton called him a "traitor to his race" because, being anti-Nazi, he was loyal to the Republic; and a quite well-known conservative Member of Parliament told this stranger that he would rather see Rheims and Dijon in German

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hands than see a communist France! Against the open menace of Hitlerian Germany, Great Britain and France needed badly to work with Russia, and "before 1914 liberal England and democratic France had found it possible to co-operate with autocratic Russia"; yet "in 1938 conservative England and plutocratic France could not abide a socialistic Russia".<sup>1</sup> Anti-red prejudice did as much as pacifism and military unreadiness to make Great Britain and France deny munitions to Republican Spain at the cost of a serious peril to their own vital interests. But what, above all, brings out the decisive power of snobbery and anti-communism is the question, "Why did the Czechs not fight?"

Why did the Czechs not fight? Spanish Republicans perhaps, but certainly no English or French person, had the right to reproach the Czechs because, left alone to face terrific odds, they surrendered. But why did they do it? We, who had studied their army, the finest army in Europe for training, staff, equipment and *morale*, and had seen the Czech people's courage unshaken and inspiring after the invasion of Austria and the trial of May 21st, we felt sure they would fight, even alone. That nearly every Czech man and woman was ready, almost anxious, to be bombed for this Republic of Masaryk was sublimely clear in September, 1938,—nobody could doubt it. The capitulation dumbfounded us. Why did they capitulate? A well-known and often well-informed English writer afterwards went about declaring that the Czechs, having been servants for centuries under the Hapsburg Empire, had a servile nature, and that it was this that

<sup>1</sup> Professor Bernadotte Schmitt, *From Versailles to Munich*, 1918-1938, p. 30 (Chicago University Press, 1938).

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came out in their disciplined submission to the *Diktats* of London and of Munich. Snobbish nonsense! We were there at the time and we bear witness: the Czechoslovak people and army were ready to fight alone against what they were told were hopeless odds. It was not they who surrendered. Beneš alone was responsible for that Czechoslovak submission, and he alone could have it put through. To do it, even he, in spite of his unequalled authority as the second founder of the Republic, had to deceive the people.

Why did he do it? Treachery is out of the question: nobody could suggest seriously that Beneš, who had given his whole unresting life to the work of creating a Czechoslovak Republic, should betray it. Was it, then, weakness? Did Beneš simply break down at the last moment? Had he, perhaps, just not quite enough physical and mental strength to stand five years of clear foreboding, six months of almost sleepless struggle and then that betrayal? Many Czechs, soldiers especially, thought so and blamed him bitterly. Even they should ask themselves whether they could have stood the strain. But Beneš did not collapse—not until after Munich. If he had collapsed before the capitulation there would have been no capitulation. If Beneš had weakened, he would have resisted Hitler, for to resist Hitler then was the line of least resistance. It would have been infinitely easier for President Beneš to resist Hitler than to resist his own people. And certainly nobody can call him a physical coward—he had risked his own life again and again for his country's independence.

President Beneš chose to deceive his people into surrender because, with the fate of Spain before his eyes, he knew that, if Czechoslovakia were to fight

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alone with Russia, Germany would summon an anti-Bolshevik crusade against her, the corrupt French Press and Parliament would at once join in this propaganda of Nazi Germany, and so would the British Parliament and Press without needing to be corrupted. Hitler would then get all the help he needed, disguised as non-intervention, and Poland and Hungary would also fall upon Czechoslovakia. Overwhelmingly outnumbered, almost wholly surrounded, and perhaps soon cut off, Czechoslovakia would almost certainly be defeated, and defeated once for all: overrun, massacred, outlawed too, so that if later a world war should come after all and Hitler be defeated, the next makers of the peace would never restore independence to the remnants of the Czechoslovak people. Perhaps he was wrong. Perhaps the consequences of surrender may be worse than the consequences of resistance, and the Republic of Masaryk might have brought down Hitler as Elizabethan England brought down inquisitorial Spain. But this is certain: it was well-grounded fear of the fear of Bolshevism that decided Beneš to surrender.

### *Chapter III*

## HAS FREEDOM A FUTURE?

**W**HAT about the future? How is democratic freedom to survive?

The World War of 1914-1918 showed, and what has followed it confirms, that brutality is not enough. Although in theory a military dictatorship without disunity and without scruples is best fitted to win a modern war, yet in fact, precisely because modern war is so ruthless, because it is war of whole peoples against whole peoples as never before, ideals are essential to victory, honesty is essential to victory. Modern war, if both sides are well equipped, tends to go on until one side or the other has a revolution; and the nations less likely to dissolve in revolution are those which have a cause in which the ordinary people can go on believing. If war comes, one essential munition of war is an ideal big enough to hold an alliance of free peoples together, a set of war aims good enough to come somewhere near making the war worth winning in spite of what it is destroying. What are the war aims of the still free peoples to be, if in the end they decide they must fight? The war aims of the last great war—a world safe for democracy, only this time made really safe for democracy by avoiding the errors of the last peace: what other aims can humane people have? Only, if they are ever to resist this tidal wave of imperialist tyranny, the democracies will have to be real democracies.

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If not, they will lose. A people that goes into a war for freedom and then finds that its rulers are men and women who put snobbery and privilege first, will rebel. Against really free countries fascist countries cannot win in the end, for fascist countries are without the one ideal that could stand the test of a long war; but against sham democracies they may well win, if only because they themselves are to some extent "classless societies". To Great Britain in case of war the Cliveden Set is a weakness worse even than the vulnerability of London. Will any nation fight under people or with people who have already betrayed the ideal for which they must fight?

There is no facile recipe for real democracy. Freedom depends, first, on people really wanting freedom, wanting it so that they do not only sigh for it but insist on it, recognise the real enemies of liberty and make up their minds to get liberty, both civil and economic, applied in a high degree for the whole people. This of course involves sweeping reforms achieved without violence, an unending battle on two fronts against two Hydras—demagogy and vested interests. Yet if people really value freedom, freedom does in fact survive even modern war and come to life again where disaster has destroyed it. At the end of the World War Lloyd George was a dictator in fact, and had achieved so much that at one point he could not bring himself to lay down his powers; but Sir Austen Chamberlain, leaning on the unquestioning individualism of the ordinary people, brought Lloyd George back to earth. The Czechs, the first Protestant nation, fell once before into captivity; they were persecuted till less than a third of them was left; yet after three centuries of alien rule they became independent again. Where

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there is a strong will to freedom there is in the end a way to freedom.

But what sort of a way? Must all the civilised peoples of the world go through the unnecessary devastation and wanton misery of a new Dark Age and suffer like the Czechs before they reach freedom? This paradox is true: to avoid the fate of the Czechs the great democracies must imitate the Republic of Masaryk.

The key problem of democracy is to give to democratic institutions an authority not derived from time or from force. President Masaryk saw that the authority of democratic institutions must be a moral authority, and he himself did most to create this moral authority in the Czechoslovak Republic. It did not die with him. In July, 1938, at the Sokol Festival, the people greeted President Beneš with the cry "Successor of Masaryk!" The Czechoslovak Republic solved the problem of authority in democracy by two "philosopher kings"—Plato's dream fulfilled. If freedom is to survive in the world, the would-be democracies must have democratic leaders: like Masaryk and Beneš, the leaders of the would-be democracies must be both leaders and democratic. Instead of aping the dynamism of dictators, they must be men who get things done without violence or intolerance of speech or policy; and democracy must be their real aim: the creation of the greatest freedom possible for the whole people, not the preservation of unearned or tyrannous freedoms for a few.

Masaryk and Beneš were great men not because a freak of nature had given them towering genius, but because they were good and truthful men as well as statesmen, philosophers as well as politicians. Although they showed their intense patriotism by working for

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years to free a small nation from alien rule, they fought against chauvinism in their people and gave all they could to the League of Nations. Unlike Lord Baldwin, who (as he himself confessed) for fear of losing an election failed to tell the British people plainly that rearmament was essential, Masaryk and Beneš made it their main aim to teach their people, so that in 1938 the Czech people understood democracy and was ready to defend it.

Above all, the Republic of Masaryk and Beneš solved the problem of reconciling military readiness with democratic freedom. Those who knew the people and army of the First Czechoslovak Republic had the chance to see how noble democracy in practice can be. In 1938 the Czechoslovak Army was truly a people's army, yet the most up-to-date army in the world; and the people, though loving the army and ready to die for independence, was not militaristic and not chauvinistic. Most ordinary Czech men and women in 1938 were quite sure that they would fight and die not for a frontier, not for the sake of subduing Germans, but for their hard-won and well-used independence and for everyone in the world who wanted freedom and humane government.

The struggle between militarist dictatorship and respect for human individuality arises again and again, letting nobody escape it. It is eternal as well as urgent. It is moral even more than it is military. If freedom is to come out of this struggle, the would-be democracies must prove themselves real democracies.

# APPENDICES



# APPENDIX I

## DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS

### DOCUMENT A

#### *The Czechoslovak Note of September 20th, 1938, in reply to the Anglo-French Proposals of September 19th*

THE Czechoslovak Government thanks the British and French Governments for the communication they have given to it, formulating their point of view on the solution of the present international difficulties concerning Czechoslovakia. Whilst taking account of the responsibility which results for it in the interest of Czechoslovakia, of her friends and allies, and in the interest of general peace, it expresses the conviction that the proposals contained in this communication are not adapted to attaining the aim pursued by the British and French Governments in the great effort they are making for peace.

These proposals have been made without consulting the representatives of Czechoslovakia, and a decision has been taken against her without her being heard, although the Czechoslovak Government has drawn attention to the fact that it cannot accept the responsibility for the declaration made without it. In consequence, also, it is comprehensible that the said proposals could not be such as to be within Czechoslovakia's possibilities.

The Czechoslovak Government cannot for constitutional reasons make a decision concerning frontiers; such a decision would not be possible without damaging the democratic régime and the juridical structure of the Czechoslovak State. In any case there would be need to consult Parliament.

In the opinion of the Government, to accept a proposal of this kind would be equal to an arbitrary and complete mutilation

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of the State in every direction. From the point of view of economy and transport Czechoslovakia would be completely lamed, and from the strategical point of view she would be placed in a supremely grave position; sooner or later she would fall under the total influence of Germany.

Even if Czechoslovakia should decide for the proposed sacrifices, the question of peace would be in no degree resolved:

(a) Many Sudeten Germans would prefer for reasons well known to emigrate from the Reich and to settle in the democratic atmosphere of the Czechoslovak State. New difficulties and new nationality struggles would be the result.

(b) The laming of Czechoslovakia would result in a profound political change in the whole of Central and South-East Europe. The equilibrium of forces in Central Europe and in Europe in general would be destroyed; this would have far-reaching consequences for all other States and above all for France.

(c) The Czechoslovak Government is sincerely grateful to the Great Powers for their intention of guaranteeing the integrity of Czechoslovakia; it esteems and appreciates it highly. Such a guarantee could certainly open the way to an *entente* between all the interested parties, if the present nationalities dispute were to be arranged amicably and in such a way as not to impose upon Czechoslovakia unacceptable sacrifices.

In recent years Czechoslovakia has given many proofs of her unshakable devotion to peace. On the insistence of her friends the Czechoslovak Government has gone, during the negotiations on the Sudeten German question, so far that this has been recognised and acknowledged by the world—moreover, one of the declarations of the British Government emphasised that it should not go outside the limits of the Czechoslovak Constitution—and even the Sudeten German Party, when the Government's last proposals were made to it, did not refuse them, and publicly manifested its conviction that the Government's intentions were genuine and sincere. In spite of the fact that at the same time rebellion was unloosed in a part of the Sudeten German population, a rebellion fomented from without, the

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Government has solemnly declared that it maintains the proposals by which it went to meet the wishes of Sudeten German nationality. To-day still it considers this procedure capable of realisation in the matter of the questions of the nationalities within the Republic.

Czechoslovakia has remained faithful to the treaties and has fulfilled the engagements resulting for her, whether in the interests of her friends, or of the League of Nations and its members, or of other nations. She has been determined, and is still determined, to keep them in all circumstances. If to-day she defends herself against possibilities of violence, she does this still in conformity with recent engagements and in conformity with the declaration of her neighbour and also in conformity with the arbitration treaty of October 16th, 1926 [*sic*], which has been recognised as still valid by the present German Government in several declarations. The Czechoslovak Government emphasises that it is possible to apply this treaty and requests that it should be done. Honouring its signature, it is ready to accept the arbitral sentence. In this way any dispute could be settled. This would facilitate a speedy, honourable and dignified solution for all the participating States.

Czechoslovakia has always been bound to France by the most devoted esteem and friendship and by the alliance which no Czechoslovak Government and no Czechoslovak would ever damage. She lived and lives in faith in the great French people, whose Government has so often given her assurance of the firmness of its friendship. To Great Britain she is bound by traditional devotion and friendship, by esteem and respect, which will always inspire Czechoslovakia in an indissoluble collaboration between the two countries and so also in the common effort for peace, whatever may be the situation in Europe.

The Czechoslovak Government is conscious that the effort which the British and French Governments are putting forth has its source in true interest. It thanks them sincerely for this interest. Nevertheless, for the reasons already mentioned it addresses itself anew to them with a last appeal and asks them to re-examine their point of view. It does this in the conviction that it defends not merely its own interests but also those of its friends, of the cause of peace, and of the cause of a healthy

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evolution of Europe. In this decisive moment it is not only a question of the fate of Czechoslovakia, but also of the fate of other nations, above all of France.

PRAGUE, September 20th, 1938<sup>1</sup>

### DOCUMENT B

*September 26th. Record by Dr. Hubert Masářík of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office of a conversation in the Černín Palace at Prague between himself and M. Lamarle of the French Legation*

“I gave Lamarle a systematic explanation on the basis of a General Staff ethnographical map, of how unjust and absurd Hitler’s demands were. Lamarle, in my presence, drafted the main points of the telegram for Paris in which he defended our point of view about the Moravian Corridor. Also in other respects his opinion was favourable to us. He told me confidentially that he spoke some days ago with Kundt, who showed him the claims of his party—according to which the frontier would be drawn near Česká Lípa, Ústí (Aussig) and Lubenec-u-Žlutice. Lamarle explained the hesitations of France (we have known each other for four years) by the deficiencies in the air force and by the fear of a bombardment of Paris. Vuillaumin returned from Germany terrified. But the last few days have brought an improvement. That is why we can now count on France.”

### DOCUMENT C

*British Time-table*

Annex to Note of September 27th, 1938

The British Government proposes the following time-table, for whose execution the British authorities could take a certain degree of responsibility:

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Czech version. The official version in French is to be found in Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong’s *When There is No Peace*, pp. 233-6.

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(1) The German Army would occupy the territory of Cheb and of Aš outside the Czechoslovak fortifications on October 1st.

(2) The meeting of the Czechoslovak and German plenipotentiaries with the British representative in a Sudeten German town on October 3rd.

The British representative will have the same voting right as his German and Czech colleagues.

At the same time, the meeting of the International Boundary Commission with German, Czech and British members.

At the same time, as far as possible, the arrival of observers and, as far as possible, of the British Legion. Later might come in addition 4 British battalions. The Legion, the observers and the Army would be placed under the orders of the Boundary Commission.

The duties of the plenipotentiaries would be the following:

(a) To make arrangements for the immediate withdrawal of the Czechoslovak Army and State Police.

(b) To determine in its general lines the protection of the minorities in the ceded territories, the right of option and the removal of property. An arrangement of the same kind might be made for the German minority in Czechoslovakia.

(c) To determine on the basis of the Franco-British plan the instructions to be given to the International Boundary Commission for the delimitation of the new frontiers as quickly as possible.

(3) On October 10th entry of the German troops into the territory of which the plenipotentiaries have declared that the arrangements have been completed. This might be the whole of the territory, but it is possible that this might prove impossible because the Czech troops had not yet withdrawn entirely, so that there would be the danger of a collision with the arriving German troops. But the International Boundary Commission should determine the final frontier by October 31st, and the Czech troops and police should retire behind this line and the German troops should occupy as far as this line by this date.

(4) The next meeting of the plenipotentiaries should consider if it is necessary to take future measures to improve the frontiers delimited by the Boundary Commission in October, with a view

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to taking into consideration the geographic and economic necessities in the various communes. They might consider if local plebiscites might not be necessary or desirable to this end.

(5) Later the stage would be reached of negotiations between Germany, Great Britain, France and Czechoslovakia with a view to:

(a) The determinations of measures in common for the demobilisation and withdrawal of troops.

(b) The revision of the present contractual system of Czechoslovakia, the introduction of a system for a common guarantee of the new Czechoslovakia.

## DOCUMENT D

### *Czechoslovak Reply to British Recommendations for a Time-table*

On September 27th His Britannic Majesty's Minister delivered in Prague the suggestion of the British Government concerning the gradual cession to Germany of parts of the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The Czechoslovak Government recognises fully the effort which the British Government has made to arrive at a specific solution of this problem, and for this reason the Czechoslovak Government has examined, as always, with the greatest conscientiousness the proposals submitted. On the request of September 27th of the French and British Governments the Czechoslovak Government has accepted their proposals and assures them that it also asks for their complete and loyal fulfilment. In order that there may not be in this matter any doubts the Czechoslovak Government gives its consent to the British and French Governments guaranteeing this fulfilment. In this sense the Czechoslovak Government acknowledges that the memorandum delivered at Godesberg on September 23rd to His Excellency Mr. Chamberlain differs so substantially from the British and French proposals that the Czechoslovak Government felt itself obliged to reject this memorandum, and Mr. Chamberlain in his speech of September 27th has declared that

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he understands the reasons for which the Czechoslovak Government could not accept these conditions.

In the same speech Mr. Chamberlain declared that the proposals delivered after his visit to Berchtesgaden—known under the name of the Franco-British proposals—are in agreement substantially with that which Mr. Chamberlain desires.

The Czechoslovak Government accept, in principle, the plan and the time-table presented by the British Government. None the less, it is necessary to object that in certain points the time-table does not agree with the Franco-British proposals.

The Government accepts the whole of the second point, except the disposition concerning the composition of the Commission of Representatives and the Boundary Commission, and point (a) in which mention is made of the recall of the Czechoslovak Army and of the State Police. Concerning the composition of the Commission, the Czechoslovak Government proposes the addition of a French member, and then the submission of controversial questions to the arbitration of a representative of the United States in cases where the representatives could not agree.

The Government accepts also the whole of point 4 and point 5.

The Government has these objections concerning points 1 and 3:

In the Franco-British proposals no particular dates were established for the evacuation and the Czechoslovak Government interpreted this to mean that evacuation would not be carried out before the competent International Commission had finished its work.

The British Government's proposal of September 27th differs also, in our judgment, in two fundamental points from the Franco-British proposals which the Czechoslovak Government accepted on the insistence of the two Governments in the interest of peace, namely:

- (1) They demand the immediate evacuation of Aš and of Cheb;
- (2) They demand the successive evacuation from October 10th onwards.

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Thus in these two cases it must be carried out before an agreement is reached on the conditions of transfer under the supervision of the international organism, in which the Czechoslovak representative also would have a seat, as was laid down in their proposals of September 19th.

Czechoslovakia cannot evacuate her territory nor demobilise nor leave her fortifications before the future frontier shall have been precisely delimited and before the new system of international guarantees which have been promised to Czechoslovakia in the Franco-British proposals shall have been established and assured. The procedure which was there proposed can be accelerated for the Czechoslovak Government does not wish in any circumstances to retard a definitive solution.

The Czechoslovak Government would accept any date for the definitive evacuation if all the conditions were fulfilled, that is to say, if the work of the Commission of plenipotentiaries and of the Boundary Commission were finished and the agreement on the guarantee were complete, whether this date were October 30th or a later date. At the same time the Czechoslovak Government would give its consent to the fixing of the date which would indicate the final limit. It would propose on this point the date of December 15th. If the work is finished it could be done sooner, on a day between October 30th and December 15th.

Here it is once more observed that the Czechoslovak Government requests with emphasis that before the work of the Plenipotentiaries and of the Boundary Commission is begun it should be determined through diplomatic channels on the basis of what principles and what material factors the new frontier is to be drawn. The Franco-British proposals establish the principle that the *Bezirke* which have more than 50 per cent of German population must be ceded. At the same time these proposals admit the possibility of arriving at a rectification of the frontier in favour of Czechoslovakia where that might be indispensable; this British plan also emphasises economic and geographic considerations.

All the frontiers of which mention has so far been made from the German side have been fixed exclusively from the German point of view without Czechoslovakia being able to make heard

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a single word. This last German memorandum fixes a frontier very sensibly removed from that which was established in the Franco-British proposals.

Czechoslovakia resolutely repeats that she cannot accept a plebiscite such as was formulated in the desiderata contained in the memorandum of the German Government.

Finally, the Czechoslovak Government emphasises that it would willingly accept the submission of any difference whatever to the arbitration of H. E. Franklin Roosevelt if, at this already advanced stage of the negotiations in which agreement on so many points concerning the procedure had already been reached, there should appear any insurmountable difficulties and obstacles, or, as the President of the United States himself proposes, an international conference might be called in the sense of the Note addressed on September 27th by the Czechoslovak Minister Masaryk to Lord Halifax.

PRAGUE, September 28th, 1938

## APPENDIX II

### DECREE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR FORBIDDING PERFORM- ANCES OF THE OSVOBOZENÉ DIVADLO OF PRAGUE

*Zemský Úřad*

No. 7182/2, 1938  
Office 20A

PRAGUE, November 9th, 1938

#### *Decree*

Mr. Jiří Voskovec  
Theatrical entrepreneur  
Praha III  
Kampa, Č. I

By a decree of January 20th, 1938, bearing the number 1070/28 ai 1936, office 20A, you were authorised to give from January 1st to December 31st, 1938, theatrical performances in the hall "U Nováků", Praha II, Vodičkova 32, at your expense and in your name, the repertoire being limited to comedies in the Czech language, vaudevilles and performances for children.

For reasons relating to public order in virtue of paragraph 5 of the Ministerial decree of November 25th, 1850, bearing the number 454 of the imperial code, and in virtue of the decree of the Court Chancellery of January 6th, 1836, volume 64, No. 5, of the police code, I abolish that authorisation forthwith, for, from the experiences of past years, it is to be feared that in your theatre we should again see the practice of illegal departures from the texts previously authorised which, in the present circumstances, might cause manifestations and demonstrations

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which are out of place both within the hall and eventually outside the theatre, and thus threaten public order and security.

Within fifteen days from the receipt of this present decree, you may appeal to the Ministry of the Interior in Prague.

But in virtue of paragraph 77/2 of the governmental decree of January 13th, 1928, and by reason of the high public interest mentioned above, I *withdraw the right of eventual appeal* which this decree confers.

Against this latter measure there is, in virtue of paragraph 4 of the law quoted above, no appeal possible.

In the name of the head of the administration of Bohemia,  
KREJČÍ, m.p.

## APPENDIX III

### SPEECH BY DR. EDWARD BENEŠ, MARCH 19TH, 1939, BROADCAST FROM CHICAGO

IN this tragic moment of European history I am addressing this appeal to the American people.

There is to-day in Central Europe a nation of Czechs and Slovaks whose territory has been violently invaded. Might has occupied a free country and subjugated a free people. Those who might fight for their liberty, for democracy and for freedom have been thrown into concentration camps by an invader. This invader has no right in this territory, but by force of might has taken all the wealth, property, industry, raw materials, gold and monies which the great efforts of 15,000,000 people have created in the last twenty years. For centuries these people—workers, peasants and modest middle-class people—have patiently and laboriously built their prosperity, without ever menacing or threatening others. They have asked for themselves only the God-given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness within their own ancient frontiers. A most brutal crime is perpetrated against this people. They have suddenly been robbed of everything they held most dear, and this crime has been committed as part of a carefully prepared programme—just as a common criminal plans for the robbery of an individual. The crime is committed within the framework of invasion by several hundred thousand soldiers, with hundreds of airplanes and tanks and military motor cars. And this tragedy occurs—this invasion comes—in time of peace and without provocation or excuse.

The Czechs and Slovaks have always lived in a very difficult geographical position. To-day they are surrounded by a nation of 80,000,000 inhabitants and have been absorbed

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within that nation. But for ten centuries, from the time of the "Good King" St. Wenceslaus, this small nation has been obliged to fight for its existence, for its liberty, and during the last century for democracy and for free development of the individual. In the fourteenth century they fought for religious tolerance under Jan Hus. For a hundred years they fought. And although finally there was a conciliation, they had paid a great price for their ideals. They were subjugated by the Habsburgs in the sixteenth century. By the middle of the seventeenth century their national State was annihilated because of their love for tolerance and liberty and respect for individual rights. For three centuries they were under the yoke of the Germans and the Magyars. The last war—the World War—liberated them, to which liberation the people of the United States contributed so much. And the national State of Czechoslovakia was established.

During the past twenty years the Czechs and Slovaks have steadily and continuously constructed a prosperous Republic—its social structure extraordinarily in equilibrium, its legislation progressive, its economics and finances in order, its budget in balance, its debts met, its export trade thriving—and with real political liberty and religious tolerance. While the State had minorities—a question with which Europe has always been confronted, and therefore Czechoslovakia was not peculiar in this regard—it has been universally recognised by the most objective statesmen, historians, scientists and sociologists, that they had established a very liberal system and one of the most tolerant policies in national and international affairs of any of the new European States. Czechoslovakia was known in all Europe as the asylum for free people and the most ardent supporter of the League of Nations. There were no persecutions of any Church, no persecutions of Catholics, no persecutions of Jews, no racial persecutions of any kind. It was a really awakened, developed and progressive democracy. It was the really successful democracy east of the Rhine. It was the Republic of that great humanist, Masaryk.

Yet it was for these very reasons that this little Republic was destroyed by a dictatorial régime.

Don't believe that it was a question of self-determination for

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a minority. From the beginning it has been a battle for the existence of the State. A dictatorship cannot tolerate freedom. A dictatorship can permit no liberty, no freedom, no democracy in its vicinity. It was and is, and will be, a battle for the existence of a free nation opposed by a totalitarian State which denies freedom. The latest move of the German dictatorship in the occupation of Czechoslovakia proves it.

This last tragic event must now finally open the eyes of the whole world to the fact that the Czechoslovak nation was from its beginning condemned by the dictators. With the subjugation of Czechoslovakia, freedom is being guillotined. And nobody in the United States or in the world should forget that the régime which is now attempting to kill freedom in Czechoslovakia is based on these three groups of conceptions:

First of all, the régime does not recognise any obligations unless it is expedient for it to do so; it will fulfil no promise; it will respect no law; it will keep no pledge; it will show no tolerance, either political or religious; it will admit no right to property either of State or of individuals unless it considers it expedient to do so. And for every crime against human decency it will always discover a pretext.

Second, the only principle on which this régime is based is the rule of force and violence. This régime can maintain no respect for the idea of right. It preaches that the only right is might—force and violence. If you look back through the pages of history, you will find that this is the system which was always termed the Age of Barbarism. To-day it would rule the world as the Age of Brute Force.

The third basis of this régime is the simple use of the old slogan “the end justifies the means”, and in their minds that end means one thing only—the success of their rule of brute force, which is combined with the propaganda of lies which they have elaborated both internally and internationally as a weapon, and as a most important factor in maintaining this régime, and in deceiving the world as to their real intent. This whole theory has been made into a State system, a system which to-day undertakes to subjugate Czechoslovakia, a system which has begun to rule throughout my country and which to-morrow will extend its terrorism still further. And the people of the

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United States and of what remains of free Europe must be prepared for a continuation and extension of this rule of Brute Force.

Five months ago, during the so-called September crisis, the Czechoslovak nation was asked to make the sacrifice of territory, and pressure was put upon my people not to fight for their freedom, integrity and independence in order to save the world from war. The appeal was made to that little people to sacrifice themselves for the peace of the world. That little people did it. And that little people received the promise of the integrity of the remnant of its national territory and of the security of its national State. That little people, having made these sacrifices under pressure of the decisions at Munich, accepted, because the four Great Powers at Munich signed an obligation to guarantee the new State.

Because of this guarantee, I repeat, this little nation made their sacrifice; and I resigned because I wished to give personal proof that I would not be an obstacle to the good-neighbourliness and good relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia, and because I wished to give to the world the proof that I participated in this self-sacrifice of my nation.

For the past five months I have imposed on myself absolute silence and complete reserve, hoping that this would contribute to give finally to my country a little peace and quiet, and to other Powers concerned the opportunity to work out the agreed solutions.

After my resignation I received thousands of manifestations, thousands of telegrams, thousands of letters from France, England, Holland, Switzerland, Scandinavia, the United States and other countries, calling down the blessings of God on the contribution of my people to the cause of peace. The whole world praised the sacrifices of Czechoslovakia! Its patience, control, discipline, steadiness—its self-domination in one of the most tragic moments of history—were outstanding; and I dare to say that no other nation could surpass Czechoslovakia in its behaviour. Mr. Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, spoke on Friday of this people as “a brave and proud people”. Yes, it was and is a brave and proud people, and it will be brave and proud of all its achievements in the last twenty

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years and of what it has done in the last five months for peace, for liberty, for humanity. It is indeed an example which it would be difficult to match in all history.

And yet, in spite of everything, in spite of its sacrifices, in spite of its self-discipline, in spite of all promises and all guarantees, one of those Powers which signed the Munich pact so solemnly after declaring for self-determination and pledging that it has no further territorial aspirations in Czechoslovakia and Europe, and in spite of the fact that the Munich Agreement has taken 1,200,000 Czechoslovak people into the frontiers of other States, this Power has now brutally broken all its pledges and obligations, has invaded the territory of the Czechs and Slovaks, has established a so-called "protectorate", has imposed its régime of terror, of secret police, of racial and religious persecution, its régime of concentration camps, its régime of complete suppression of free Press and free speech, its régime of brutality and inhumanity—and that Power has declared that all this is done in the name of peace in Europe. This same régime began by asking self-determination for a minority. Its second move was to press its need for self-defence against action by this small, disarmed, surrounded nation. The third step was the envelopment and encirclement of this little nation by Germany. And the final argument was that as a consequence of this third step by envelopment and encirclement, this national Czechoslovak territory must be taken over in the interests of general peace.

So by these four moves this dictatorship has assured peace—the peace of the cemetery!

These are the facts. And I put these facts before the whole American people and before the conscience of the entire world. Let the facts speak for themselves.

For twenty years I have worked for peace, for real peace. But to-day there is no peace in Europe. What is considered a state of peace is but a terrible illusion, an illusion which will one day take its toll in the enormous sacrifice of all the nations of the world. Because there is war already! Yes, there is war to-day in Europe; but there is war on one side only, and while one party makes war, the other can merely look on.

And again I say to the world that everybody must understand

### APPENDIX III

that there will be no peace, there will be no respite, there will be no order until the crimes that have been committed in Europe are wiped out, until there is again respect for the given word, until the idea of honesty—personal honesty and State honesty—is re-established, until the principles of individual and international liberty are secured, and until real courage takes command and requires that brute force must stop.

Don't forget that it is not only Europe that is involved, not only Central and South-Eastern European nations, the French nation, the British nation, the Scandinavian nation, the people of the United States, but the whole world that is in danger, not only from war but from the destruction of every high concept of human morality, by the demolition of every fine concept of liberty, by the disintegration of every concept of honesty and decency. That is the danger to-day. A society which continues to tolerate such a state of things will be destroyed and will disappear.

I place before the world court of public opinion these facts, and in at last stating clearly what I mean and what I feel, I continue to be a believer in the ideals of liberty and in the simple concept of human honesty and dignity. I know that in the history of mankind brute force has always fallen after every such brutal and terrible misuse of power. The man who in modern history has been taken as a symbol of brute force, Napoleon, has declared: "There are in the world two powers—the Sword and the Spirit. The Spirit has always vanquished the Sword." In this statement I am able to stand with Napoleon. I declare that the independence of Czechoslovakia was not crushed; it continues, it lives, it exists. And I solemnly declare that those who have perpetrated this crime against the Czechoslovak nation and against all mankind are guilty before God and will be punished.

During the last months, and especially in the period that preceded and followed the September crisis, I have many times been attacked personally. I have never answered. I never shall answer. But until my last breath I shall continue the fight for the freedom of my people and for their rights, and I am sure that my nation will emerge from this struggle as it has done many times before in its history, as brave and as proud as

## LOST LIBERTY?

she has been throughout the past, and having always with her the sympathy and the recognition and the love of all decent people in the world. And there is no more fitting place for me to make this declaration than in this free country of Washington and Lincoln.

So I must end with an appeal to the American people. I would beg that they do not permit such conceptions and ideas as are now trying to dominate Europe to be tolerated in this free country. Because in the approaching battle for the victory of the Spirit against the Sword, the United States has a very great role to play. Be ready for that conflict and be strong, oh people of Democracy!

To all right-thinking men and women everywhere I give the motto of my beloved nation—"Truth prevails".



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